DEATHMATE!

#124

KEVIN VAN HOOK
A VALIANT VIEW OF
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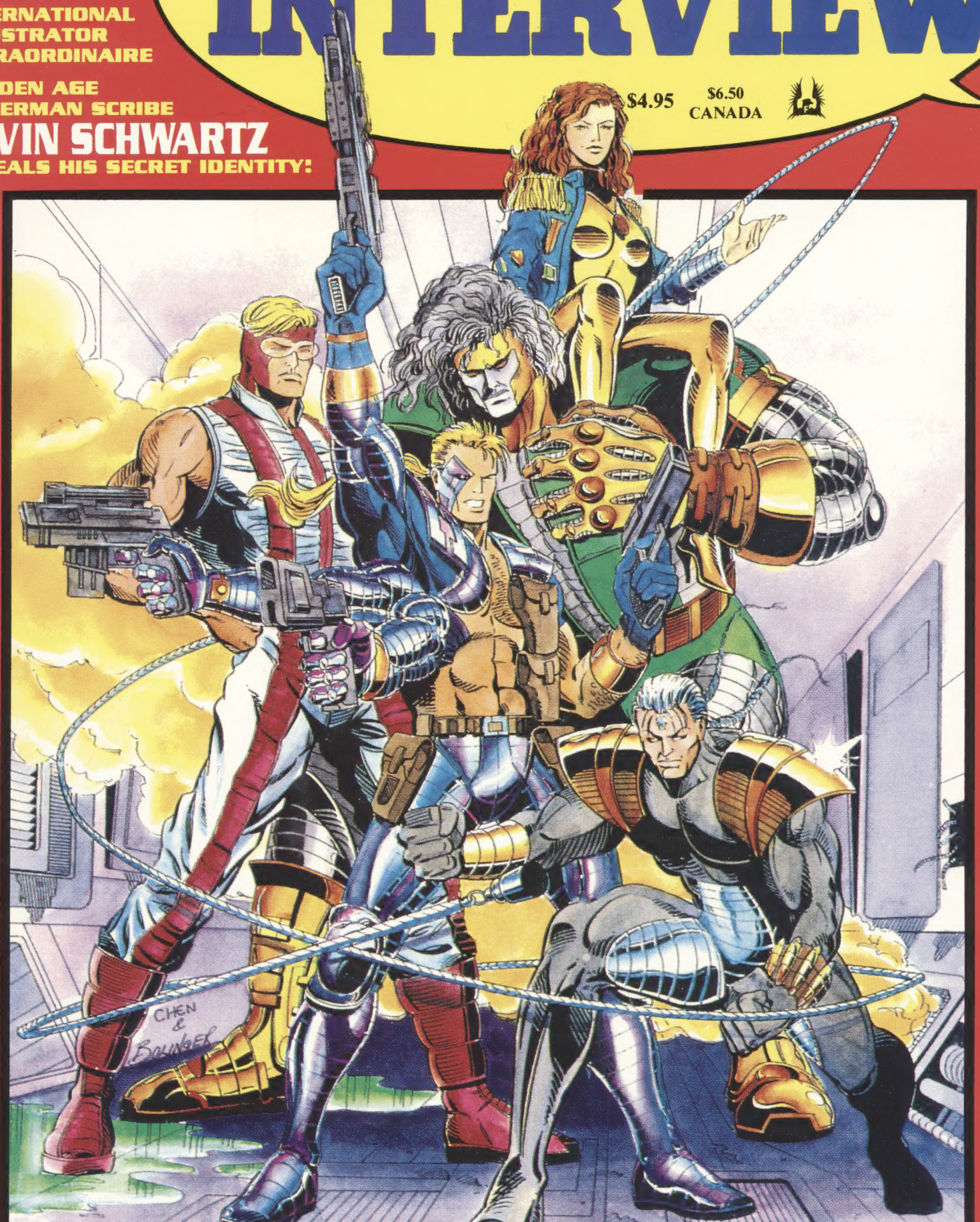

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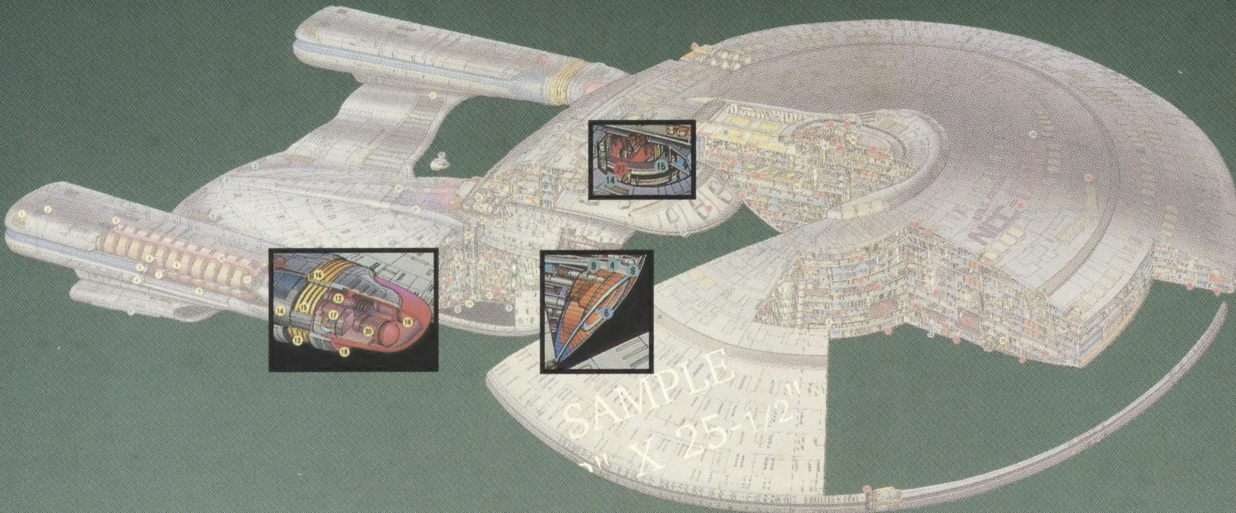

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CAROL VAN HOOK

UP FRONT

Hey, remember the Branch Davidians? In case they've been supplanted in your consciousness by more recent media circuses, they were the evil cultists who cleansed the world of themselves by fire, back in Waco, TX a few months ago.

Anybody have a clear idea what constitutes a cult? From where I sit, the difference between a cult and a religion is like terrorism and military action — if it has a sufficiently large organization (such as the U.S. government or the Catholic Church) behind it, it's military action or religion; if it involves an obscure splinter group, it's terrorism or a cult.

Saw an item in the paper by a local cultmonger/religious leader, vehemently denouncing an article about cults. It's not, he piously stated, that people shouldn't be wary of cults. He just objected to his noble faith being cited as one.

Verb conjugation: "I adhere faithfully to my traditional creed. You cling stubbornly to outmoded dogma. He, she or it is a slave to ancient superstitions."

But setting aside whether **Koresh's** claim to divinity seems more or less absurd to a nonbeliever than that of **Jesus**, what was his crime?

Yeah, I know, they had children with them. They responded negatively to being surrounded by law-enforcement officers. They had guns.

But I have children in my house, too. I wouldn't care much for being surrounded hostile people. And if I were to keep a gun for the protection of my home, you'd have a hard time convincing me I was doing wrong. Furthermore, I hold non-standard beliefs. If the government decided to wipe me out, they could make me look just like a miniature **David Koresh.**

The stand-off is said to have started when the religious persons shot at officers serving search warrants. As I understand it, the warrants were served not by hand, but by foot, the feet being thrust through upper-storey windows at 4 a.m.

I dunno, guys, I always thought it was *okay* to shoot at people kicking in your bedroom windows in the middle of the night.

Then there's the Surprise Ending. Being Cultists, they were of course expected to commit suicide in a big way — the news hammered that into our heads. So we were well prepared when they shot themselves to death, *then* set fire to the place — all *except* the law-enforcement people, who were taken completely by surprise! And always, the children, *the children* form the mantra of those trying to justify the carnage.

If all this happened because the Branch Davidians kept illegal guns, then those children are victims of gun-control laws.

One wonders, what did they *really* do to bring such wrath down on themselves? At the time, I thought it was just a macho trip — the FBI acted like a jerk, then demonized them because it couldn't back off gracefully. But since then, I've heard a rumor — just a rumor — that Koresh was writing a book drawing parallels between the One World Conspiracy, the Bilderbergers, Trilateralists, New World Order, whatever you call it — anyway, a parallel between current trends toward worldwide consolidation of power, and Biblical prophecies of Armageddon. While this doesn't affect any of *my* opinions, I can see where the U.S. government might be peeved.

—Don Markstein

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“It’s been an enormous task, where each studio or

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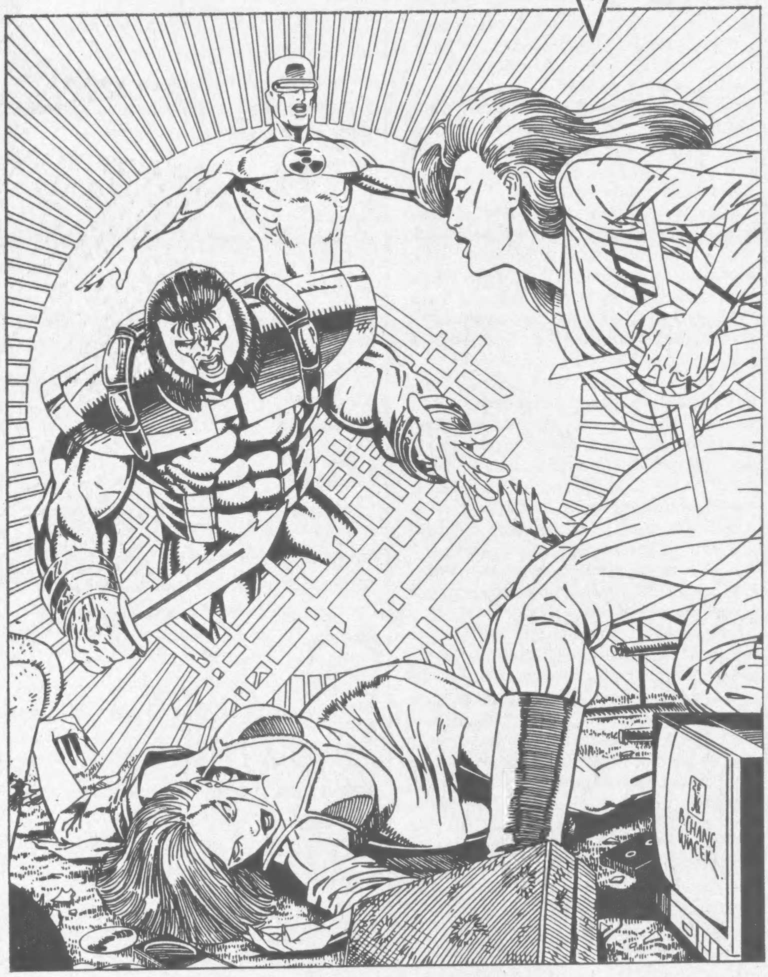

It feels good to have a success,” announces Valiant Publishing’s Kevin VanHook. As a struggling creator, VanHook had been working in and out of the comics industry for nearly a decade when his break came upon a chance call to Valiant to inquire about a submission sent in. Since that fateful call a couple of years ago, Kevin has emerged as one of Valiant’s most prolific writers, scripting the monthly SOLAR, ETERNAL WARRIOR and BLOODSHOT, as well as serving as Valiant’s executive editor. We caught up with him late one afternoon as Valiant’s biggest project to date was hitting the printer. DEATHMATE, the much-anticipated cross-over series with Image Comics, is set to be one of summer 1993’s most-talked-about mini-series. VanHook, a key player in the development of this series, was generous and enthusiastic in discussing DEATHMATE, Valiant, and breaking into comics . . .

MARK LUCAS: *What was the genesis for DEATHMATE? How did this come about?*

KEVIN VANHOOK: **Rob Liefeld** liked the Bloodshot character early on. He’d sent a fax to **Steve Massarsky** and myself saying, “Bloodshot-Youngblood: This Blood’s for You.” We thought it was kind of interesting. **Bob Layton** started thinking about it. There were meetings amongst both the Homage and Image Studios people and ourselves, and we decided how many of our people would be

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VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Kevin VanHook
Born: 24 June, 1965 — Indianapolis, Indiana
Current Residence: Jersey City, NJ
Education: High school
Occupation: Executive editor, Valiant Publishing (Voyager Communications)
Influences (writers): Frank Miller and Mike Grell
Influences (artists): Al Williamson, Paul Gulacy, the more realistic representation people.
Work proudest of: Valiant's body of work (especially SOLAR #21-23)
Favorite comic (published today): SHADOWMAN

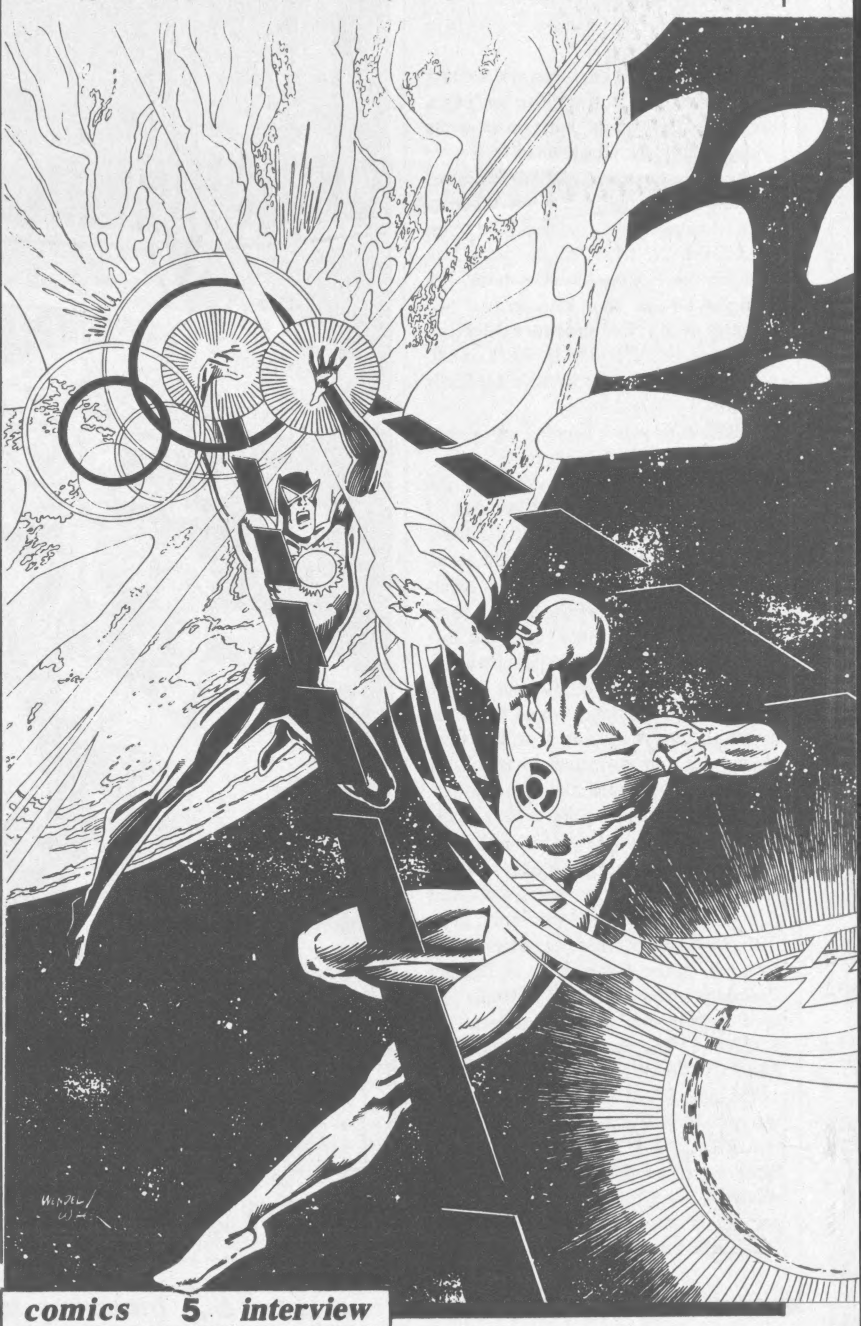
involved and so forth. Because they have so many diverse studios, we had to decide whether or not **Todd McFarlane's** group would be interested in working on it and various things. Once that was decided upon, they started coming up with a way to join the universes to make it work. There were several clandestine meetings, both in California and midway, **Bob Layton, John Hartz,** and **Steve Massarsky** from our end, and Rob, **Jim Lee** and **Marc Silvestri** from their end, primarily. That's pretty much how it got started, just after the San Diego Con of last year.

MARK: *Isn't this a logistical and legal nightmare?*

KEVIN: Legally, I don't know. I haven't had that much to do with it. Logistically, yes. It's been an enormous task, especially with their group where each studio or each individual owns the copyright and trademark on their characters, and they have to have full approval. With us, it's Valiant, it's easy enough. Art and Editorial have to approve it. But, we don't have to track down individual people who are off making their own deals with **Spielberg** or whatever. From that end, it's been tough, but we're doing it. We've been able to push everything through. The first book is at press as we speak. I was very glad to see that finished. I think it's a good, fun story. It's interesting to see both their characters and ours mesh in the same timeline and universe.

MARK: *Is this an imaginary story, or will the effects of DEATHMATE affect future Valiant and/or Image continuities?*

KEVIN: No and no. (Laughter.) I'll tell you why. It's not imaginary because what happens involves their characters and ours, Void and Solar, but a Solar that has split off from the main Solar in our series — this is the character in RAI #0 who went off in search of other galaxies and universes to explore — who meets Void in the depths of space. When the two interact, because they're made of totally different types of energies, their union ends up destroying their own timelines. It sort of twists back, almost like a spiralling string, intertwining and eating away at their own universes. So, certain things never happened. It spirals back in such a way that the universes are thrown together. Things that should have happened don't. There are characters in the storylines who are prophets, like Prophet from Image or a Geomancer like Geoff, who can see what the future should have held but doesn't anymore. All of a sudden, it doesn't one day, and they know something is wrong. That is basically the



Marc Silvestri. PROPHET and all YOUNGBLOOD characters TM & ©1993 Rob Liefeld. BATTLESTONE and all BRIGADE characters TM & ©1993 Rob Liefeld.

“Bob Layton and the guys sat down. Bob had a premise

premise for how we deal with this. So, there's a gathering of heroes to prevent this destruction from happening in the future.

MARK: *Will the effects affect the future Valiant books?*

KEVIN: No, they won't. Basically, they succeed. So, it never happened. They stopped time and put it right.

MARK: *So it's relatively self-contained?*

KEVIN: It's very self-contained. The prologue, the four books and then the epilogue. The epilogue concludes it and wraps everything up.

MARK: *How are Valiant's chapters different from Image's?*

KEVIN: On the Valiant side, we're doing two books, four stories each, ten pages each. We have eight basic cross-overs going in this shared universe. We have Magnus/Battlestone, Solar/Supreme, Shadowman/Grifter, and so on. Whereas with Image, my understanding on DEATHMATE BLACK, the work I've seen on the Homage Studios book, it's going to be one book divided into two chapters by **Jim Lee** and **Marc Silvestri.** Whereas, DEATHMATE RED is 40 pages, one story, done by **Rob Liefeld's** studio.

MARK: *How was it decided who would write or draw which characters?*

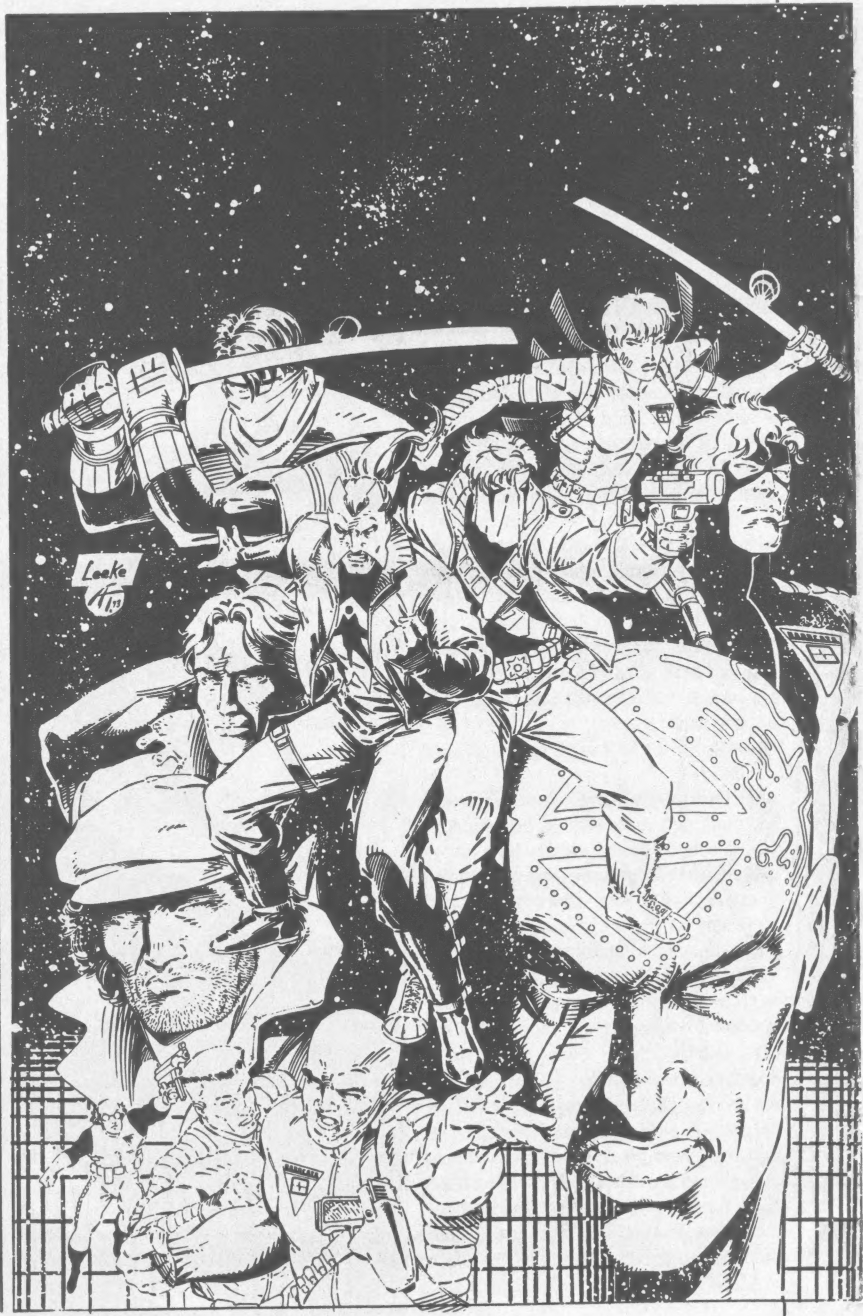
KEVIN: When it was initiated, the powers-that-be sat down and decided, “I get these characters and you get these characters,” and tussled back and forth. Concessions were made on both sides. For instance, some of the guys like to draw big, bulky guys like Turok and X-O and whatnot. We chose which characters we were interested in. Outside of the prologue and epilogue, which is a free-for-all — everybody's in it, to an extent — we only do characters in which we have the shared characters. For example, they have Prophet, we don't. He's in the prologue and epilogue but not in the rest of the series. As far as our end, how we decided who would do what, we decided this was primarily a Solar story even though there were other characters in it. I wrote it, **Peter Grau** drew it, **Jimmy Palmiotti** inked it, **Carol VanHook** colored it, so it was the regular team for SOLAR. In the case of something like SECRET WEAPONS, dealing with some of the other WildC.A.T. characters, since we've combined things we ended up with H.A.R.D.C.A.T.S. and the WildCorp. Since we've combined these things, we wanted to make it so everyone could be a part of this. **Joe St. Pierre,** who normally writes and draws, only wrote it. **Kathryn Bolinger,** who normally inks and colors, only inked it. Other people got to be involved in it.

MARK: *How did something like H.A.R.D.C.A.T.S. come about?*

KEVIN: Basically, **Bob Layton** and the guys sat down. Bob had a premise to go from and they all built upon that. Since he was writing the prologue, what everybody did stems from that story. We were looking at the fact that they had a team and we had a team. We could make it work in this universe if all of these characters are part of this organization. It makes sense to take the H.A.R.D.Corps and WildC.A.T.S. characters and combine them, mix-and-match them and come up with these two different covert teams.

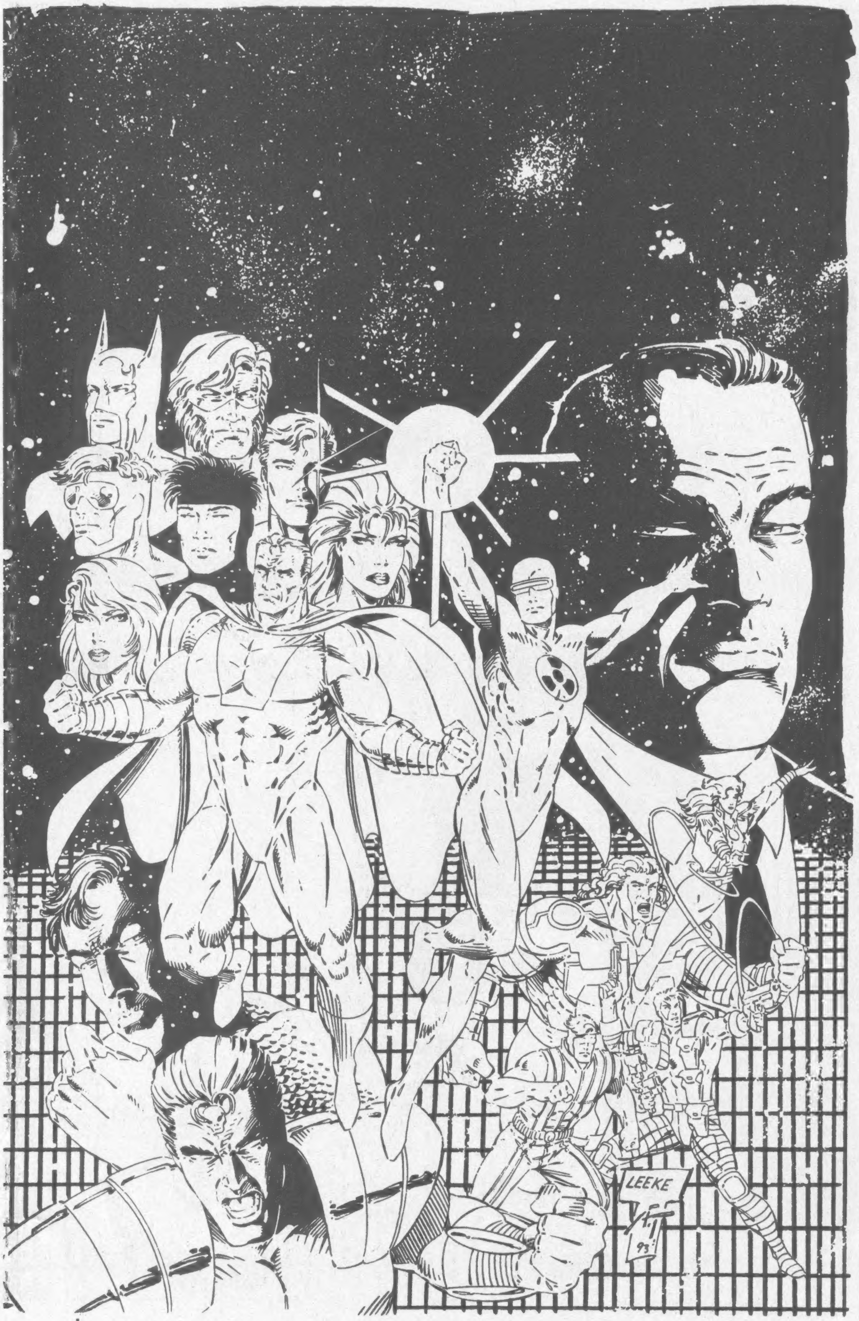
MARK: *What sort of amalgamations of characters are there? Archer isn't quite the way we remember him.*

KEVIN: Archer's a bad-guy in this universe. I wrote a preview for Diamond's PREVIEWS, a Shadowman/Grifter



to go from. What everybody did stems from that story.”

story, that gave you a taste of what DEATHMATE was going to be like. In that world, the Grifter character is a member of H.A.R.D.C.A.T.S. *(Pause.)* Sometimes I have to stop and think about it, too! He's a member of the H.A.R.D.C.A.T.S. team who's working for Seth Black and these people who run that organization in this world. He's trying to track down Harbingers, much like H.A.R.D.Corps does in our universe. But this particular one is a homicidal killer. Because he never went to Ladakh and never became very philosophical and meditative all he did was take the hate and fear he grew up with after living with parents who were child molesters and who tried to kill him; it has turned him into a very bitter and twisted person. He goes around assassinating religious figures. Shadowman, who's a member of the New Orleans voodoo scene is representative of an almost-religious figure. So, Archer's tracking him down. It's very much a different universe. But, it's fun to look at the characters we know and look at them with a twist. It's a fun "what if" game.



MARK: *What's your input on the whole story?*

KEVIN: I've had a fair amount, especially in terms of tying the DEATHMATE BLUE together as a cohesive story. We have individual stories. Since all of us, except for **John Ostrander,** writing that book are here in the Valiant office, we sat down and said, "Let's make this one really tight continuity. You do your ten pages in a self-contained story but it leads right into mine." That was **Maurice Fontenot** and **Joe St. Pierre.** Once we completed our stories, we turned it over to **John Ostrander,** who had to start the story. It was fun. I did a lot of coordination work in that respect.

MARK: *You're writing the Supreme/Solar chapter of that story?*

KEVIN: Yes. that's the final chapter before the epilogue. So, I had to get the characters to a point where they had to jump to the epilogue, which had already been started. It's interesting to get the next-to-last hole to fill in. You know where you have to start. You know where you have to end. But, you still have to make it work as an interesting story.

MARK: *What's going on in that chapter?*

KEVIN: Basically, Harada has been convinced by Geoff the Geomancer that all of this is very real, that there is a problem, that this is not the way the universe is supposed to be. Despite how well Harada may think things are going for him in this universe, it is not the way it should be. Harada has then, in turn, to convince Solar that, in the future, this is happening and that he has to stop it. Once Solar is convinced, he has to convince Supreme. Along the way, they are stopped by Master Darque and Dr. Eclipse, who are shady characters even in this world. Master Darque wants to be there when the universe finally eats itself to the center and is destroyed so he can absorb that energy. He's always looking for the ultimate energy rush. They do form an unholy alliance because of what Master Darque is able to offer him. It ends with them heading toward the ripped time and unreality, to the future and stop things.

MARK: *With so many characters and concepts around, why limit it to six books?*

KEVIN: Remember question #2: "Isn't this a legal and logistical nightmare?" It boils down to making sense in terms of

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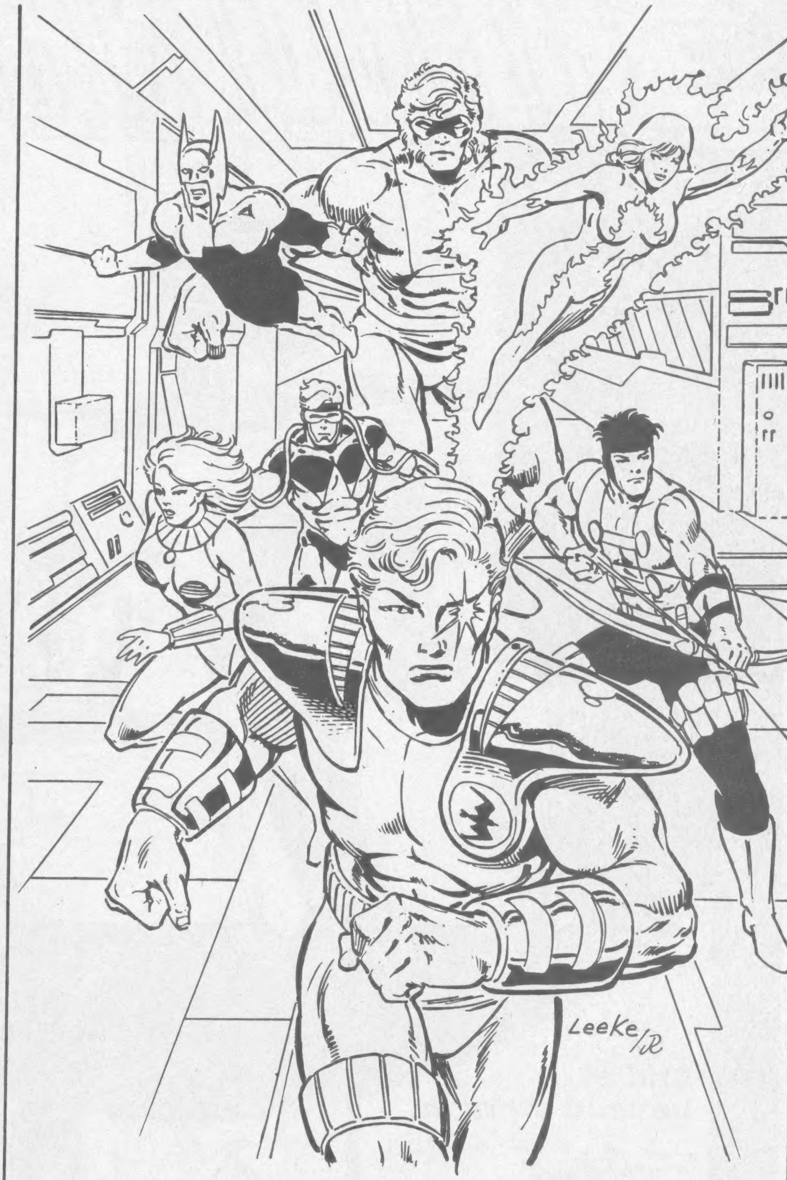


how much time we could spend. In both cases, we’re still growing companies. We have to concentrate on making sure we get our regular books out. We’ve got a good reputation for timeliness and level of quality. We want to make sure that we don’t overextend ourselves and can still maintain that.

MARK: *Is that why the 41st century characters aren’t represented?*

KEVIN: No, the 41st century isn’t represented because the 41st century stories basically revolve around the fact that Magnus is in that time period. Many things are dealing with the fact that Bloodshot existed. However, in this universe, Unity never happened. Since Unity never happened, Bloodshot wasn’t created, his blood was not passed on, and wasn’t there to inspire Grandmother’s rise. Since Unity never happened, Magnus was never taken away by Solar and given to 1A to become Magnus, Robot Fighter, in the 41st century. Instead, we do a Magnus/Battlestone story in which Magnus, 20 years down the line, is the 21-year-old Torkelson kid whose father was killed. Torque was killed in a totally different way than he was in our universe. Magnus is very much a rebel, on a big Harley bike. It’s an interesting twist.

MARK: *Image has a reputation for shipping titles late. Was this a concern for Valiant doing the prologue?*

KEVIN: It’s a great concern. I think that was part of the logistics behind it. We had a better chance of putting it out on time. But Image, by and large, has been very cooperative in working on trying to make this a go, coming out on time. **Marc Silvestri** and **Jim Lee,** especially, have made a great deal of effort to make sure the books come out on time. Did you also notice that our books are color-coded, outside of the prologue and epilogue? That is so, if a book is shipped out of order for some reason, it doesn’t matter. The stories are a shared universe but not directly tied to one another so you absolutely have to read each chapter. So, if you read BLACK and YELLOW — one of theirs and one of ours — you’re fine. If you pick up BLUE and RED, you’re fine. If you pick up just ours or theirs, you’re fine. If you just pick up the prologue and epilogue, it still all works together.

MARK: *Valiant has produced special limited collector’s editions for some of its books. Are any planned for DEATHMATE?*

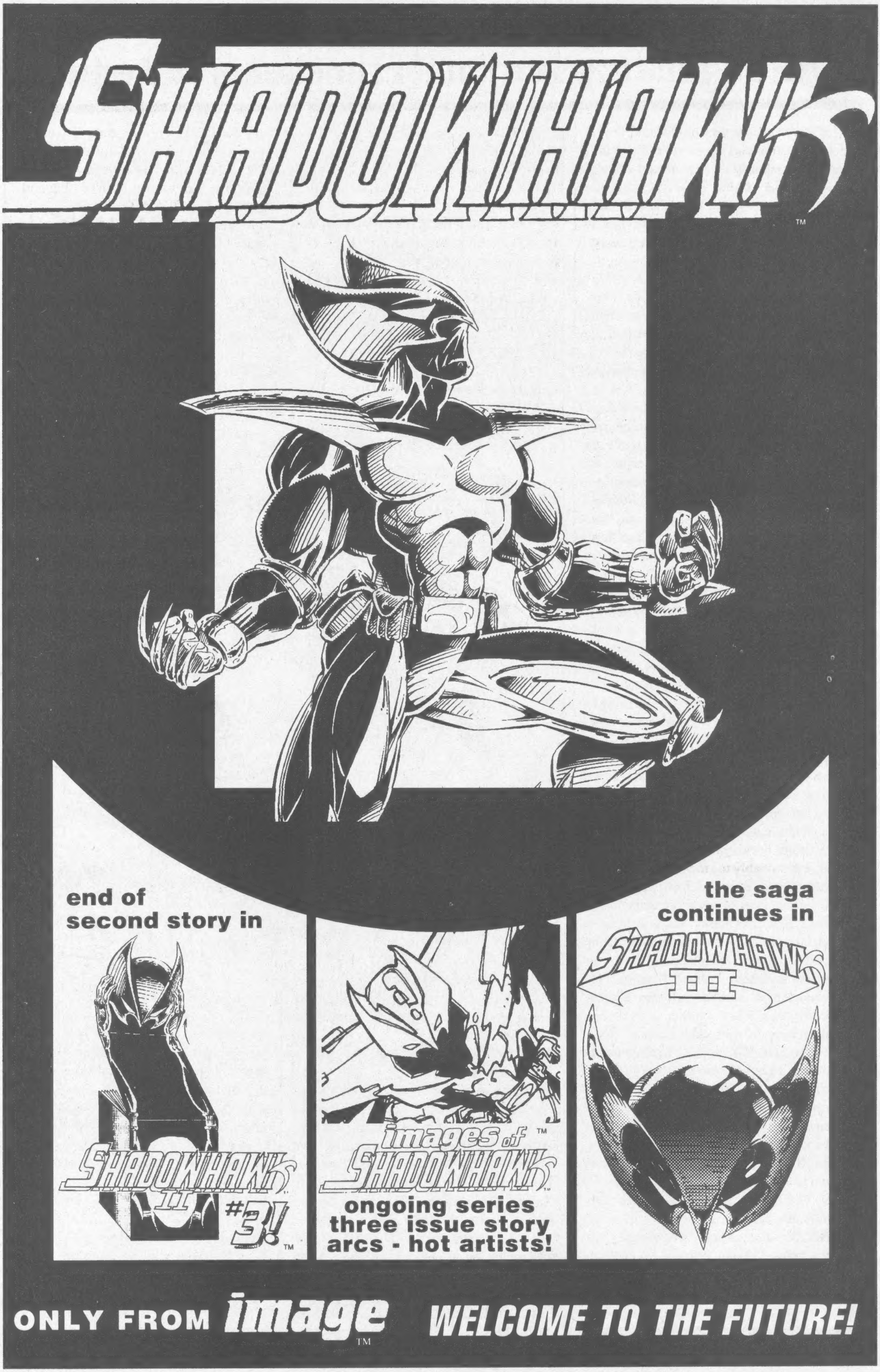
KEVIN: Not to my knowledge. But sometimes I’m not directly involved in that aspect of marketing. With as many conventions and trade shows as I’ve been doing lately, I might not be around to know about that, unless I happen to overhear something.

MARK: *They seem to feed the collectors and speculators.*

KEVIN: To some extent. But, you have to realize that the specialty books, at least in terms of the gold books, were initially done as incentives for readability. For people to read the books and buy the books . . . and to do something nice for Valiant. We have the gold logo program where, if you promote Valiant in some way or in conjunction with your store, we will send you a Valiant gold logo book and one for your store. We don’t sell them. We don’t make any money on them at all. It’s a limited print run of either 5,000 or 5,500. I think speculators got in on them by either buying them from collectors or people who received them by legitimate means. I don’t think it was something we did to intentionally feed speculators. I think the biggest thing that kicked speculators off on Valiant was that our early books just didn’t sell very well, so there are very few copies out there in terms of print runs.

MARK: *Valiant and Image seem more open to cross-overs than other companies.*

KEVIN: That may be true. We’ve only done one other one besides this. That was with Dark Horse: PREDATOR VS.



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"I think Shooter is a good creator, a good editor."

MAGNUS. At the time, we were a small company, and Dark Horse was one of the leading companies. It was a good choice for the time. We're doing MAGNUS/NEXUS now with **Mike Baron** and **Steve Rude.** Valiant's going to handle all production and printing of it. Since every aspect is going to be done in-house, it should run smoother. We have fewer titles to deal with to get out on a monthly basis than Dark Horse. We shouldn't have the kinds of problems we had with the second issue of PREDATOR VS. MAGNUS.

MARK: *Do you foresee more intra-industry cross-overs forthcoming?*

KEVIN: Not with us. I think we're going to pare it down. In all cases, I don't think we regret anything we've done in terms of a cross-over. They were always right for the time. It held us in a nice position for this summer's "glut." Right now, we're concentrating on our own titles and the new books we're producing. Valiant has always had a plan for a slow, steady growth.

MARK: *You mentioned the summer glut. How do you think that will affect Valiant? And, so you see a crash forthcoming?*

KEVIN: Crash, I don't know. As for affecting Valiant, sales will probably be reduced slightly but not greatly. I think we're in a better position than most companies to absorb that because we've had better sales. From what I understand, Dark Horse's and Malibu's new universes are being received okay but nothing phenomenal. I'm not aware of anything that Marvel's doing that's just going to wipe-out everyone. DC's Batman/Azrael is probably the most exciting thing they're doing in terms of collectors and sales. As far as a crash, I'm not sure. There will be stores that will be hurt, but those are typically the stores that aren't good at what they're doing. They're over-ordering and speculating. Those people are weeded out routinely in this industry anyway.

MARK: *And on the publisher's side?*

KEVIN: I'm not sure. It depends on if you bank all of your money on something and it doesn't pan out. Then you're going to disappear. It's really tough to see. I've been saying, and I'll stand by it: It's going to be a very interesting summer.

MARK: *What about the fall and subsequent Christmas?*

KEVIN: If we see the same type of companies popping up with entire universes, then there will be people falling by the wayside. Again, I think Valiant is well-positioned because our books come out on time. The quality stays at a certain level. I don't think that we'll have a problem, but there are people who could fall by the wayside.

MARK: *What are your thoughts on Defiant?*

KEVIN: Actually, I know very little about it. I think **Jim Shooter** is a very good creator, a good editor. I wish him well. Looking at it from a business standpoint, I'm not sure where he's headed or what he plans to do.

MARK: *Moving along, you write BLOODSHOT, ETERNAL WARRIOR, and SOLAR, MAN OF THE ATOM. How do you have time to edit as well?*

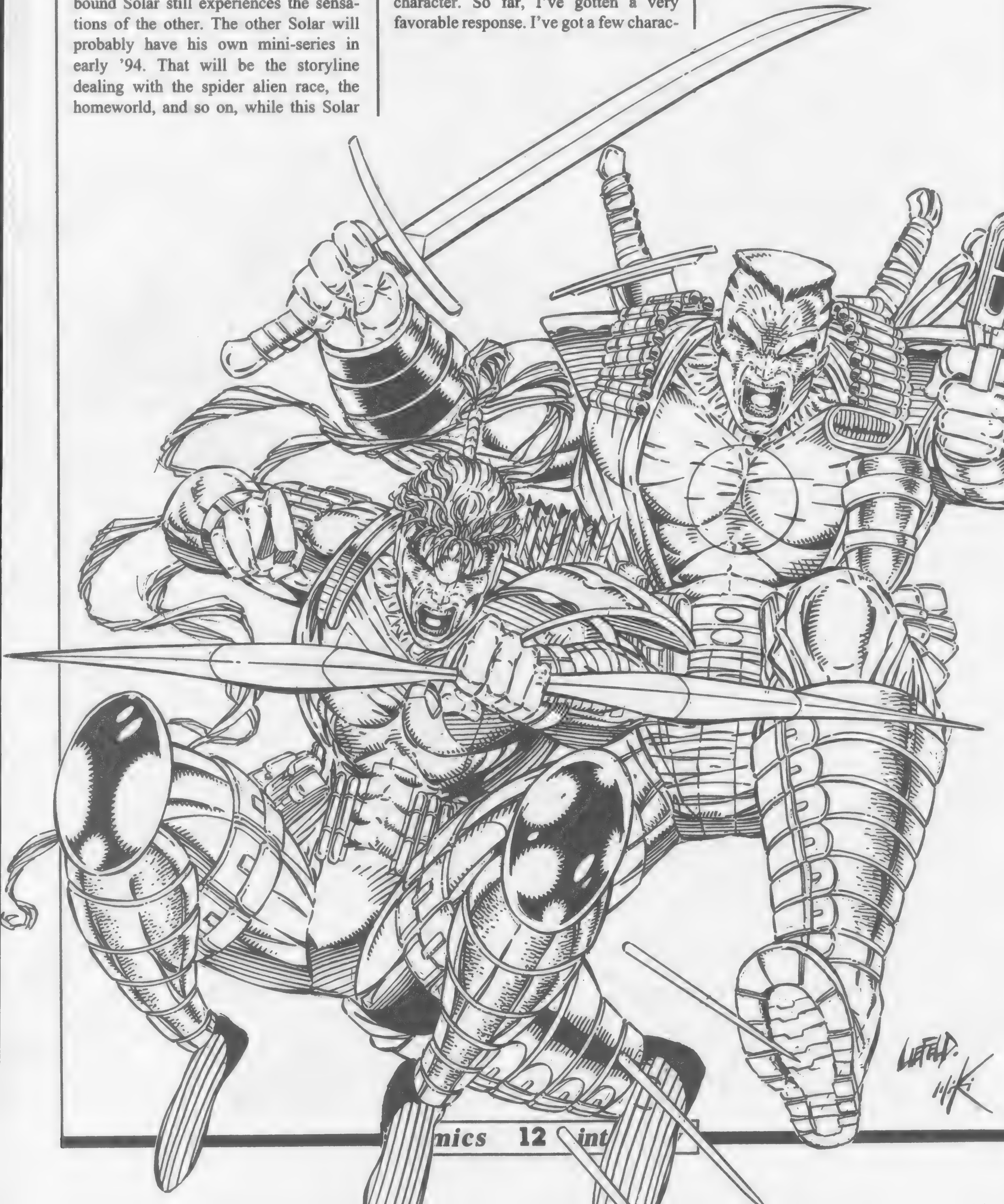
KEVIN: I sleep on alternate Thursdays. I don't have a lot of free time. I have a family as well. It's tough. But, I enjoy my work. This is what I've always wanted to do, writing and drawing. I'm writing and drawing BLOODSHOT #0, which is coming out in December. I started out in comics as a penciller. I worked bouncing around. I like writing because I can still tell the stories while doing thumbnail sketches, quickie pencil layouts, and hand them to the penciller and get back this wonderful draftsmanship that would take me hours and hours to do. It's kind of vicarious that way. I can still pencil without having to do it. It's tough, though, keeping the schedule straight.

Leeke
Ryder

"It's typical to take a character who is immortal and have

MARK: *What do you have planned for each of the characters?*

KEVIN: In the case of Solar, I've just taken the character through a pretty major . . . I don't want to say revitalization as much as experience, where he splintered himself in half. One half went off after the spider aliens, which has been an obsession of his. The two halves of the persona still have a psionic link. So, the earthbound Solar still experiences the sensations of the other. The other Solar will probably have his own mini-series in early '94. That will be the storyline dealing with the spider alien race, the homeworld, and so on, while this Solar will continue to grow and explore the limits of his powers, what he's capable of. I also want to keep pushing the characterization. Out of the three books, I think that's where I have the strongest characters. I have good characters. I have Gail, I have Phil, surroundings, a best friend. I'm able to make the characters play off each other well. With BLOODSHOT, that's still a new book. I'm developing that character. So far, I've gotten a very favorable response. I've got a few characters I'm building up who are tied directly into the ETERNAL WARRIOR series as well that I do with **Mark Moretti.** That book — I've been able to take it in the direction I've wanted to. I'm very interested in the "mission" concept of storytelling, in which an action-adventure hero can be basically handed a mission. It



them refuse to love anyone because they'll lose them.”

opens up a whole range of stories. Anything can be a mission, as opposed to a situation where initially he was finding out about himself, the people who created him, and his former involvement with the Mafia. The ETERNAL WARRIOR story is tying in more and more with Geoff the Geomancer, not necessarily within the pages of the book but his commitment to the Fist of the Seal of the Earth. We're also going to be trying to develop Gilad more of a personal life, letting the character allow himself to develop more lasting relationships, even with the realization that he will live long after these people. I think that should be interesting. It's typical to take a character who is an immortal and have them refuse to love anyone because they'll always know they'll lose them. But, we're going to approach it more from the idea of people who have long, lasting marriages of 20 years each and merely find someone else after their loved ones die. That's essentially where we're headed with the Warrior. It'll be more grim. We may do stories that expand on the prologue aspect, where we tell a story that takes place in the past then cut to the present. Or, we may do an entire issue that takes place in the past. It's to open that format up a little bit. It's something I like a lot. I'm a big history and mythology buff.

MARK: *You're planning on having his plans jump in time?*

KEVIN: For the last year, the first 3-5 pages of each issue take place in the past. Then you jump to the present. What we may do is the entire book in the past. We've yet to do a future story with the Eternal Warrior, even though we know that character lives in the 4002 time period. But, we may. You'll probably see things that tie into his brother Ivar, the time walker, and Aram from ARCHER & ARMSTRONG.

MARK: *Are you planning closer ties with SECRET WEAPONS?*

KEVIN: They're pretty close. BLOODSHOT #8 leads directly to SECRET WEAPONS. SOLAR #25 is chapter two of a three-part story, begun in SECRET WEAPONS #1 and concluding in SECRET WEAPONS #2. That piece is very fun because I got to go back to a character I developed in SOLAR #14, the Fred Bender character who's now Dr. Eclipse. It was a lot of fun to write a man who was pretty nuts to begin with, is now a complete and certifiable psychopath, a psychopath who has powers to rival Solar's. It's a lot of fun to play with a distortion of what this guy's doing.

MARK: *Is a final showdown with Master Darque in the cards?*

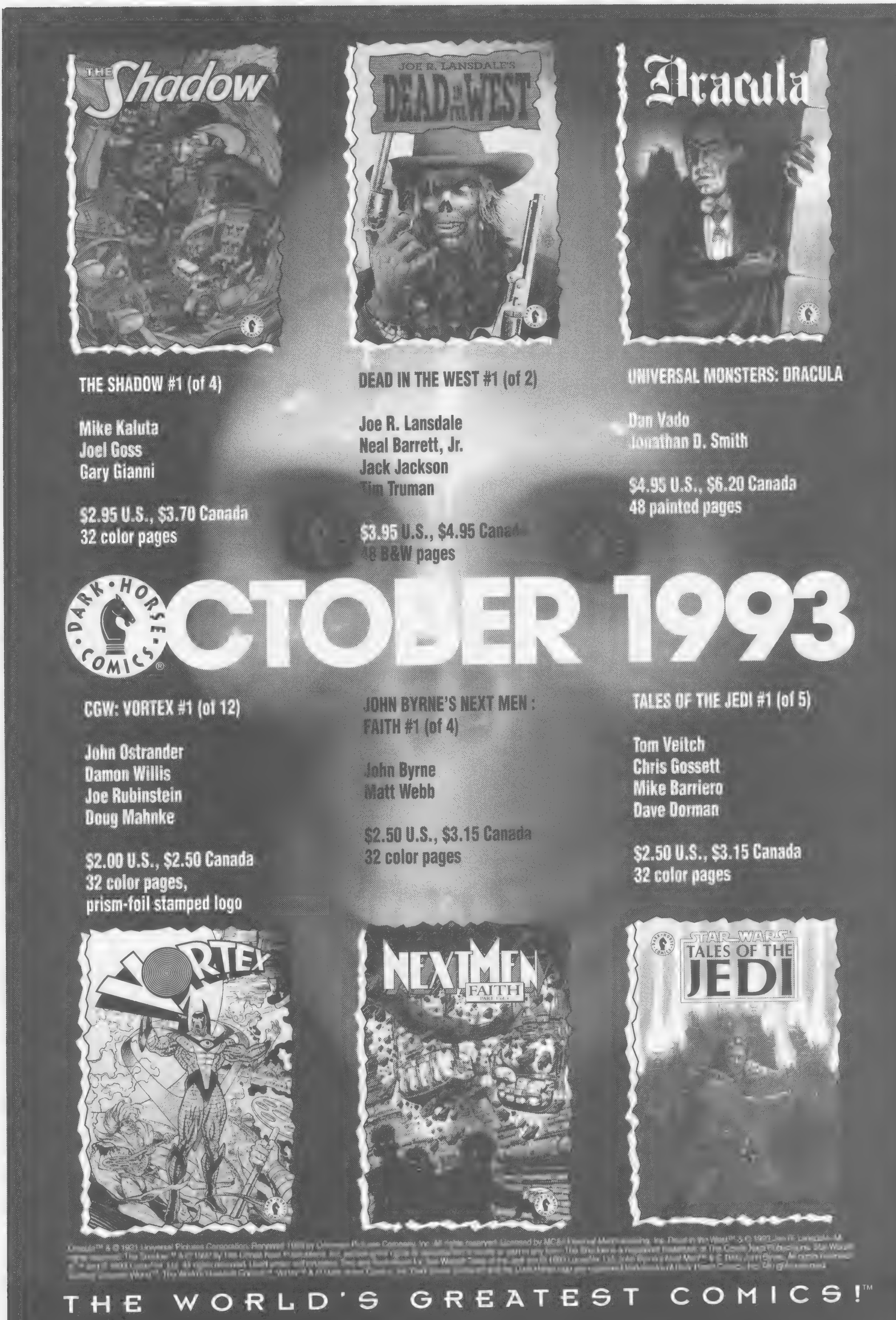
KEVIN: Master Darque's showdown has been prophesied to be in 1999, because that's when Shadowman dies at his hand. That would be the final showdown. Along the way, he'll be dealing directly with Dr. Mirage and with Shadowman, affecting and manipulating other things through his minions that affect Solar and the Eternal Warrior, but the Eternal Warrior more than Solar.

MARK: *So, we'll expect to see him around for a few years at least.*

KEVIN: Oh, yeah. His actual physical appearances will probably be curtailed somewhat because you don't want to overexpose somebody like that. By all rights, he seems to be one of the most popular villains created since Dr. Doom, in talking with the fans. It's fascinating to hear people at conventions and trade shows talk about a villain this way. You get it with the characters, but when it's a villain you know it's something that clicks.

MARK: *Will he possibly be spun-off to his own mini-series?*

KEVIN: Anything's possible, but that's not really the Valiant style, if we have one, especially to do a villain-oriented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"In the '70s, people mimicked Neal Adams and got work."

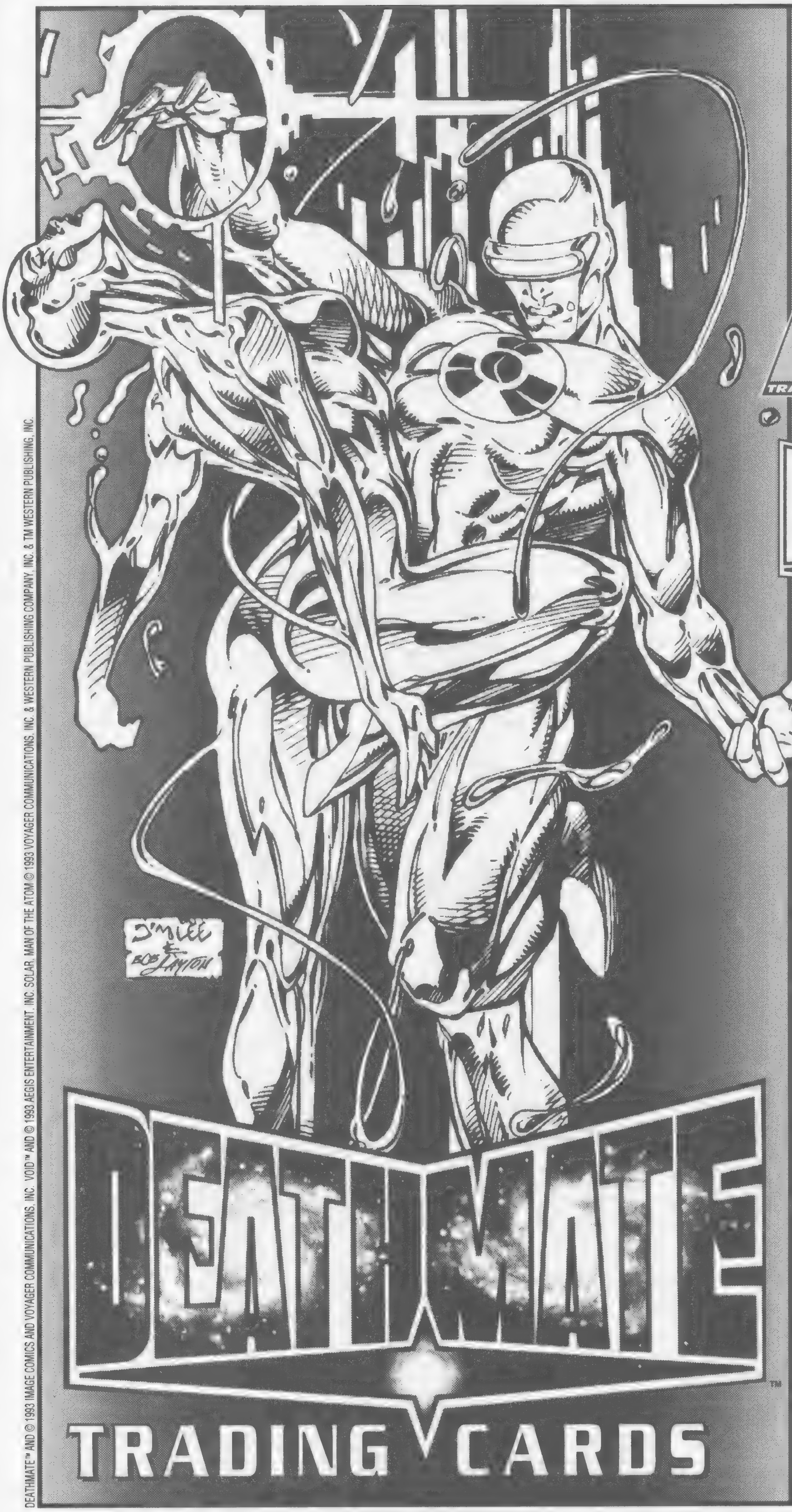
mini-series. It's possible to do a one-shot story that tells his origin, which we haven't really explored. But I doubt a mini-series at this time.

MARK: *You got your start working in comics for smaller companies like Caliber. How did you jump to Valiant from there?*

KEVIN: In my situation, I'd worked for Innovation. I'd worked for Caliber. I'd pencilled for Pacific. I was writing, pencilling, and inking for Caliber as well as being their art director, which was really more of a production manager, because with a company of creator-owned characters, there's no art direction, per se, especially with stuff as diverse as Caliber's stuff. I wasn't happy with that. I wanted to write and draw. Unfortunately, black and whites took a drastic hit in spring 1991. Sales went from something you could live with at 8,000-9,000 — at least, I was making money doing it — to 800 copies. It was a losing money proposition for everybody involved. So, I quit that and resigned myself to working outside the industry to make a living for a time. I was doing color separations and photo illustration. I have a strong Macintosh printing background. I was doing that professionally. I was sending samples to everyone along the way. I called up Valiant to see what kind of progress was being made; if anyone had seen the stuff, what they thought of my work. During the conversation, I discussed my background. To make a long story short, I flew out here and was hired as Valiant's production manager. I worked as production manager for almost a year, and then was made executive editor, as I'd been writing for the company for about nine months at the time. I started co-writing with **Jim Shooter** on SOLAR #14. When he left, I just kept the book. I had a feel for what was happening with ETERNAL WARRIOR #3. That was started and I finished that book. I started picking up titles. I turned in competent work on time. And, it snowballed from there. It was very unusual. it's not the way I think things usually work out in terms of making a jump like that. I was very lucky. The timing was good. I was ready in terms of making sure I could deliver what I said I could. As I tell people almost every day, only a very little part of being a professional is being able to write and draw well. It's vital and gets your foot in the door. Turning your stuff in on time and being respectful of the next guy on the assembly line is just as important if not more so.

MARK: *From your vantage point, what advice would you offer newcomers to the industry?*

KEVIN: The biggest one would be what I just said in terms of being professional. It's tough. I can honestly say I never got work outside of one pencilling job at Marvel by cold submitting. I never got work through the mail in terms of just sending in photocopies. So, I can't say from personal experience that that works. At Valiant, we look at everything. If you send a submission in, we do see it. It's important that you write legibly, that you send in good copies, that you have respect for the person who's looking at the work. I wouldn't call and harass the submission people or the editors at any company. Even though everyone has the best intentions at heart, it's all too easy, if you've gotten the fifth call from a guy whose stuff only arrived yesterday and he's 40 envelopes down on the pile, your attitude to him is already colored. I wouldn't recommend that. I think going to conventions is good, showing your work at portfolio rooms. If you're an artist, getting your training in terms of an art school background is recommended. I didn't. I was largely self-taught and learned through showing my work to professionals, asking "Is this right? What am I doing wrong here?" Learning pacing and so forth. Though, there's been a trend in the last few years of people being able to get work by mimicking hot artists. It happened earlier. In the '70s, people mimicked **Neal Adams** and got work. I would recommend not doing that. It's tough. That kind of thing's always a fad. There's a time when that fad runs out. Then you have a tough time trying to draw things another way. I would recommend not worrying about style but trying to tell stories well. Obviously, you're going to be influenced by the people you like. But, I wouldn't intentionally mimic. In terms of writing, it's the same thing. If you turn in something that's weird for the sake of weird and you're mimicking **Alan Moore** but you don't know what he's doing underneath, the structure of where he's coming from when he makes a sentence sound a certain way or have a certain rhythm. It's much more important to study



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“I’ve been around ten years. It feels good to have a success.”

the roots of what you’re doing.

MARK: *Well, what’s next for Kevin VanHook?*

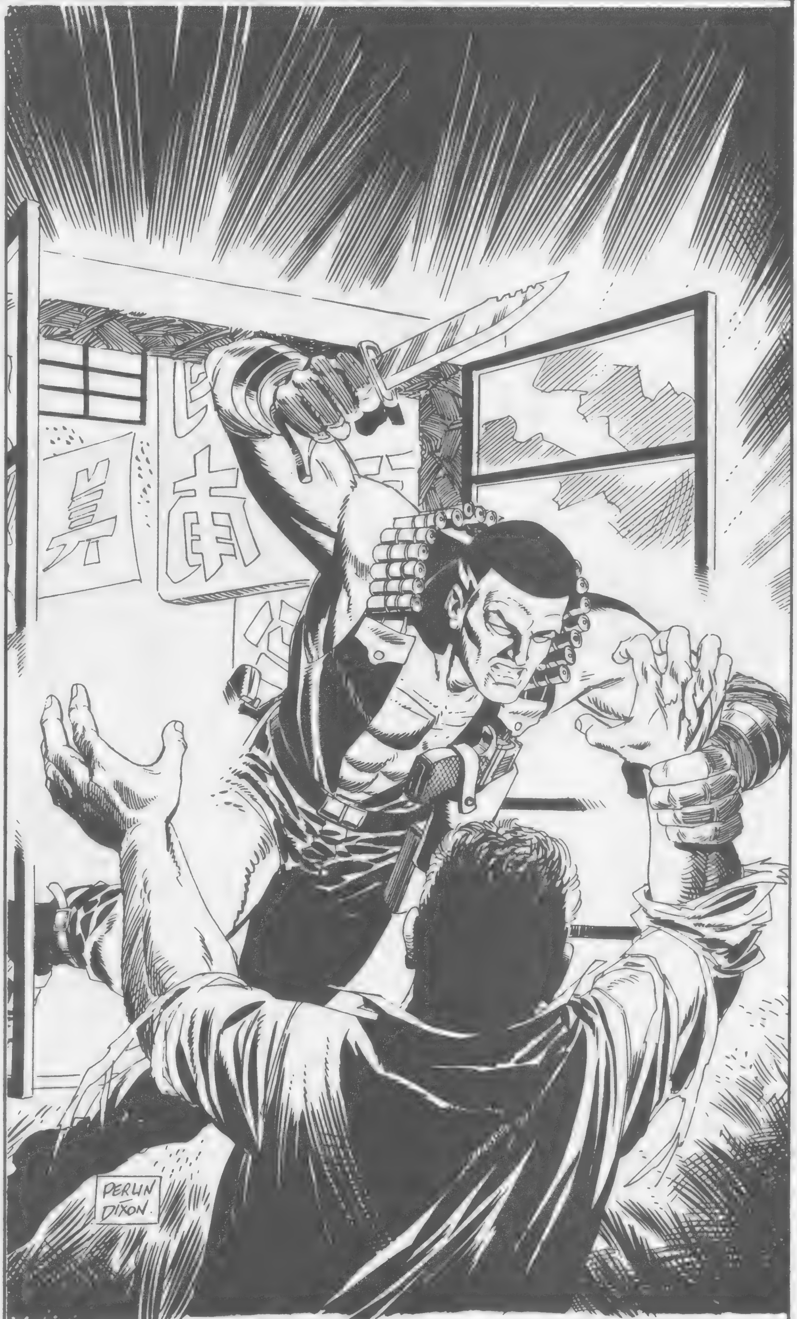
KEVIN: I plan to be here a long time. I like it here. The people are good people. They’re solid. It’s a fun place. I plan on writing my three books for a while to come, drawing the occasional book a year I think I can squeak out with my schedule. It’s literally down to a page a month as far as how much time I have to devote to it. And, specialty books. I’m writing a BLOODSHOT YEARBOOK. The doors are wide open here. It’s the best of all possible worlds for me. I get to work with talented people like **Bob Layton, Don Perlin, Stan Drake,** and **John Dixon,** people whose work I respected long before I ever came here. I intend to stay here for awhile, see how Valiant grows and where we are in 5-10 years.

MARK: *So, what’s next for Valiant, then?*

KEVIN: I think it’s the same thing as I view for myself personally. We’re in it for the long haul. The company plans to be in it for the long haul. We plan to have a slow, steady growth and not cheat the reader by doing something merely because it’s superficial or flashy or glitzy. We’ve had four or five enhanced covers in the 2½ years the company’s been in business. Those were always with the reasoning that there’s a story behind the covers. We plan on keeping that approach. It’s a wait and see. We have plans through mid-1994 for what titles we’re adding, and how we’re revamping and keeping existing titles exciting. We’re here for a long time to come.

MARK: *Is Valiant intending to introduce any creator-owned or non-Valiant universe titles?*

KEVIN: To the best of my knowledge, we have no plans for non-Valiant universe titles. In terms of creator-owned, there’s a plan in place where creators may retain certain rights regarding percentages of licensing and so forth of characters they create. That’s offered in certain circumstances. There is some participation in place. However, if **James O’Barr** brought in the Crow or something and wanted it to be published by Valiant, there are no plans or place for that to happen, in the same way as there’s no place for me to take my Frost character, that I own and retain rights to, and publish it here. I think in a lot of ways that’s best. I like the fact that Valiant’s focused. I think that’s the biggest attraction for me. Everything else I’ve said gets centered there. We’re focused in our marketing. We’re focused in how we’re going to tell a story. Creator-owned works are things that do not fall in the boundaries of what Valiant does and does well. For example, if something is creator-owned and it’s two weeks late, what do you do?



MARK: *What is it like to be one of the creative hands behind this summer’s “hottest” cross-over?*

KEVIN: It’s exciting. They’re a fun bunch of people to work with on it. To feel the excitement of a **Rob Liefeld** or **Jim Lee** when you’re talking about it, or our guys when we’re sitting around coming up with ideas on how we’re going to interpret their characters. It’s great. There’s no other way to say it than that. I’ve been kicking around for ten years, since I was 17-18 years old, pencilling at Pacific Comics on work that never even came out. It feels good to have a success.

“I was in the same first-grade class as Robert Kahn,

ALVIN SCHWARTZ

Photos are, left to right, September 1956, September 1967, and September 1991.

Until recently, Alvin Schwartz has been one of the more obscure Superman and Batman writers of the Golden and early Silver Age. Indeed, only two years ago, a columnist for the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE responded to a short article about him in his home-town paper with genuine doubts as to the extent, and even the very existence, of his work for DC. While he worked for DC for 17 years, and a number of his stories have been reprinted in the decades since, none had then been credited and one or two have been miscredited to others. Even comics historian Jerry Bails once erroneously listed his real name as a pseudonym of Joseph Greene, another writer entirely!

In truth, if Alvin Schwartz labored in anonymity, it was in large part by his own choice. His interests in writing are largely literary, and he has had much serious poetry and several novels published. In 1948, in response to a NEW YORKER interviewer's curiosity about how he could write Superman and philosophical novels at the same time, he jokingly explained that he had separate identities for his comics and his literary writing, and changed clothes in a telephone booth in his studio. The telephone booth, needless to say, was as nonexistent as it is in most Superman stories, but the two identities were not. His comic-book scripts weren't signed with his own name, and even his pseudonym appeared only on rare occasions.

Fortunately for comics historians, in the last year Schwartz has emerged from obscurity, and his work has begun to attract specific fan attention. Kitchen Sink, in collaboration with DC, has reprinted the entire run of the original BATMAN newspaper strip of 1943 to 1946 with full credits. About half of the stories were scripted by Schwartz, and the success of this collection has led to serious consideration by the two publishers of following it up with the longer-lasting SUPERMAN strip, which Schwartz scripted at the same time.

During his years with DC, Schwartz scripted a number of memorable stories and invented some unique characters. The characters he recalls most fondly often aren't the ones best remembered by fandom; he was prouder of creations like Hayfoot Henry and the invisible Ogies who plagued Superman, than he is of his pivotal role in introducing green kryptonite and the recurring team of Superman and Batman, neither of which he considered particularly outstanding ideas. But he continues to have well-formed and interesting opinions on a field he entered chiefly to make a living, rarely followed except through his children, and with which he has only recently re-established some contact.

This interview was chiefly conducted at the apartment of Alvin and Kay Schwartz in Florida, with parts taking place at the Tampa, Florida, SunCon of January 19, 1992.

known as Bob Kane. But I never followed the comics.”

RICH MORRISSEY: *From what you tell me, you never were particularly interested in comics, even as a boy.*

ALVIN SCHWARTZ: Well, I did follow some of the newspaper strips, I thought KRAZY KAT was a genuine work of art. My interests were always in serious writing, and I was editor of my high school's literary magazine, THE MAGPIE. **Will Eisner** was one of the staff artists, and I'd also been in the same first-grade class as **Robert Kahn,** who later became known as **Bob Kane.** But I'd never followed the comic books until my friend **Jon Small,** a comic-book artist, suggested I might like to get into the field to make some extra money. This was around 1941.

RICH: *How did that come about?*

ALVIN: He was working on a comic book called FAIRY TALE PARADE for Street & Smith. It featured adaptations of fairy tales. He told me the editor, a man named **William deGrouchy,** was especially fond of Russian fairy tales, so, because I was very broke at the time, I went to the library and looked some up. Then I wrote up an adaptation of one, and brought it in to him. He told me, “Sorry, we just received an adaptation of that one from our staff writer.” But after I got home, **deGrouchy** called me. It seemed he liked my version better than the other and wanted to buy it after all. I did several more for him.

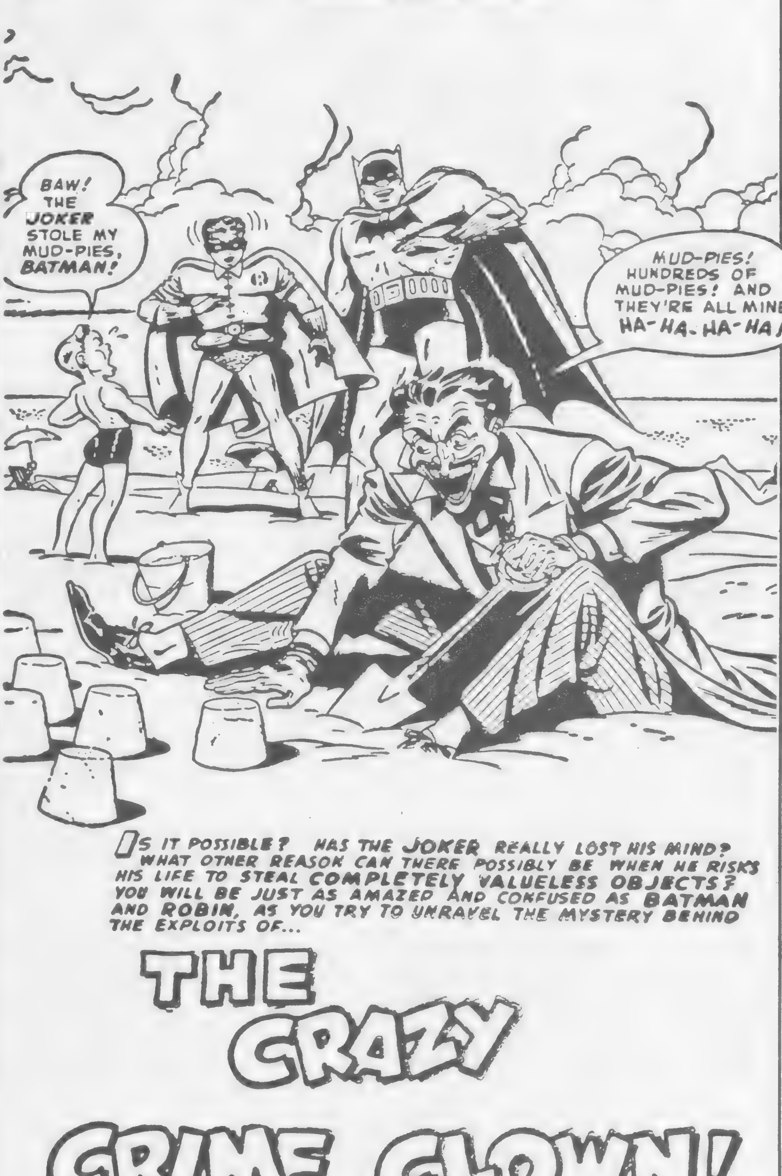
RICH: *Did you pick up any other comics work at the time?*

ALVIN: I tried working for Fawcett, on CAPTAIN MARVEL. The editor was **Henry Aveline Perkins,** a true product of the English Public School system — Charterhouse, to be exact. I'd known him socially, again through **Jon Small.** In fact, it was also at **Small's** place that I met **Bill Finger,** long before I even considered writing comics. But I didn't get along too well with **Perkins,** who had very definite and very unclear ideas about what he wanted — probably reflecting the insecurity he felt as an editor. He didn't last too long at Fawcett himself.

RICH: *When did you start working for DC?*

ALVIN: Actually, I wrote The Flash, Green Lantern, Green Arrow, Mr. Terrific and the Newsboy Legion plus a few others — before they were taken over by DC. Maybe 1941. **Shelly Mayer** was the editor, working for **M.C. Gaines.** Quite a story about how I met Shelly. There was this little restaurant in the Village called Alex's Borscht Bowl, and Alex was a lovable, eccentric Russian who preferred to play the balalaika rather than cook, and — oh well — this is too long a story. Let's just say Alex introduced me to the man whom he called, in his heavily-accented English, complete with inversions — Meyer Sheldon.

Splash page from BATMAN #74 (December/January 1952-53), by Schwartz, Sprang and Paris.


BAW! THE JOKER STOLE MY MUD-PIES, BATMAN!
MUD-PIES! HUNDREDS OF MUD-PIES! AND THEY'RE ALL MINE! HA-HA-HA-HA!
IS IT POSSIBLE? HAS THE JOKER REALLY LOST HIS MIND? WHAT OTHER REASON CAN THERE POSSIBLY BE WHEN HE RISKS HIS LIFE TO STEAL COMPLETELY VALUELESS OBJECTS? YOU WILL BE JUST AS AMAZED AND CONFUSED AS BATMAN AND ROBIN, AS YOU TRY TO UNRAVEL THE MYSTERY BEHIND THE EXPLOITS OF...
THE CRAZY CRIME CLOWN!

RICH: *There was a Superman story around 1944 about a place called Sergei's Borscht Bowl.* (“The Chef of Bohemia,” ACTION COMICS #78.) *Was that yours?*

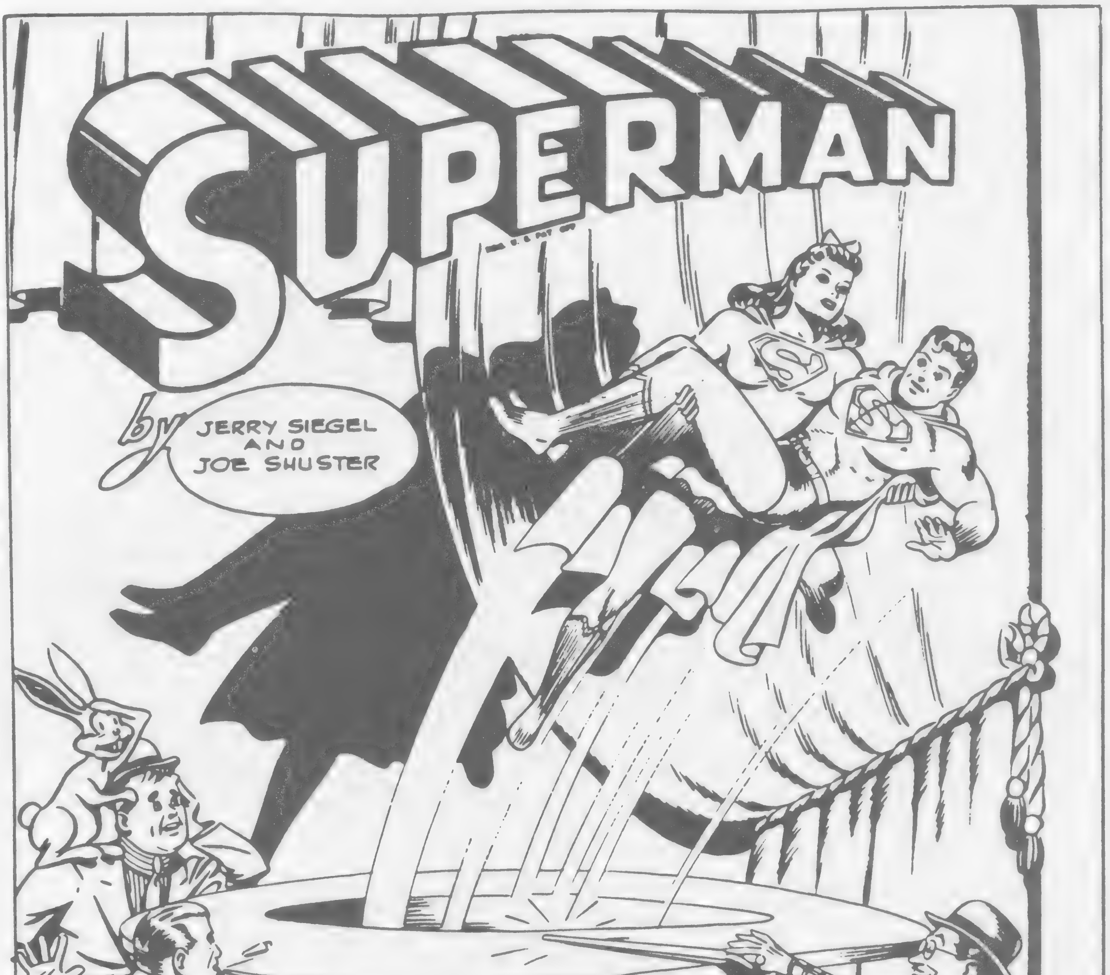
ALVIN: Yes, that was based on Alex. Isn't that the one where Sergei leaves a piece of beef on the counter to tell Superman that Biff Condor was the villain? Superman has to interpret through Sergei's accent — beef on counter, i.e., Biff Condor.

RICH: (Showing Schwartz a copy of ACTION #78) *The art's by Ira Yarbrough, one of Joe Shuster's ghosts. Did you ever meet him?*

ALVIN: I didn't meet the artists that much, except later when I was doing the dailies. I knew **Wayne Boring** and **Win Mortimer** — Win was a neighbor of mine — very well. I remember one

All artwork accompanying this interview ©1992 DC Comics, Inc.

“As far as I’m concerned, Bill Finger created Batman,


SUPERMAN
by JERRY SIEGEL AND JOE SHUSTER
COME AND SEE THAT HILARIOUS PAIR OF CUCKOO CONJURERS, HOCUS AND POCUS, MAGICIANS BY ACCIDENT, INVOLVE THE MAN OF STEEL IN A TANGLE OF WOEFUL WIZARDRY– AND MAGIC GOES BERSERK TO PROVE THAT IT TAKES A SUPERMAN TO PRODUCE A SUPERWOMAN. WATCH LOIS LANE RIDE THE SKYWAYS SIDE BY SIDE WITH THE MAN OF TOMORROW! SEE HOW FEMININE PSYCHOLOGY FINALLY PROVES TO BE MIGHTIER THAN MAGIC, ENABLING WEARY SUPERMAN TO BRING TO A SLAP-HAPPY CONCLUSION THE METEORIC CAREER OF...“Lois Lane, Superwoman!”
1
For Rich — Julius Schwartz

Splash for SUPERMAN #43 (1947), by Schwartz and Sikela. Note: This page has been autographed to our interviewer. Panels from this story appear on the next page.

even if Bob Kane was the only one with his name on it."

Superman artist who was there almost from the beginning — not **Shuster** or **Boring** — who was a dead ringer for **Edie Adams**' husband, the comedian. What was his name — **Ernie Kovacs?**

RICH: *That could have been John Sikela. Joe Desris — the editor on the BATMAN strip collections, who talked with both Schwartz and me in great detail — says he's just tracked him down.*

ALVIN: I don't remember his name. But the restaurant in this story was quite accurate except for that ghastly moustache on Sergei. Alex had a soft round face with no hirsute adornment whatsoever, not even on top of his head. He wasn't totally bald, but he cut it very close.

RICH: *I was getting a bit ahead of myself. How did you start writing for DC itself?*

ALVIN: Through my friend **Charlie Green.** He wrote THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE, a Thrilling Publications pulp magazine. Several of the DC editors — **Weisinger, Jack Schiff,** and **Whit Ellsworth** — started out there, working for **Leo Margulies.** Whit was editor-in-chief, **Weisinger** was associate editor-in-chief, and **Schiff** was next in command. It was unfortunate that **Weisinger** had authority over **Schiff,** although **Ellsworth** often stepped in to stop Mort from throwing his considerable weight around. Mort was there first, then got called into the Army, where he sat on his fat ass at Yale for the duration, selling articles to the slick magazines. So **Schiff** was editing the SUPERMAN and BATMAN books, and wanted **Green** to write BATMAN.

RICH: *Green told Will Murray* (a pulp historian) *he wrote quite a few BATMAN stories.*

ALVIN: No, he never wrote more than one. I'd occasionally helped him plot THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE, so he asked me to collaborate on a Batman story, since I knew the field. He may have helped work with mutual friend Johnny (**Ryerson Johnson,** another prolific pulp writer), who did write comics at one time. I asked **Johnson,** who wrote a few over a period of six months. But after the one serious collaboration with me, Charlie found the medium too restricting and got out, leaving the field to me. So, thanks to Charlie, I found myself writing Batman, and not long after, when **Jerry Siegel** was drafted, I wrote SUPERMAN stories, too.

RICH: *Who were the other people writing the stories at the time?*

ALVIN: Well, **Bill Finger** — as far as I'm concerned, he's the real creator of Batman, even if **Bob Kane** was the only one who had his name on it. Bill had a great sense of the medium and was good at plotting. We frequently shared ideas and got together to write our stories. I learned a lot from him, but his writing really wasn't strong enough to get him permanently out of comics.

RICH: *He did work in TV for a while in the late '60s.*

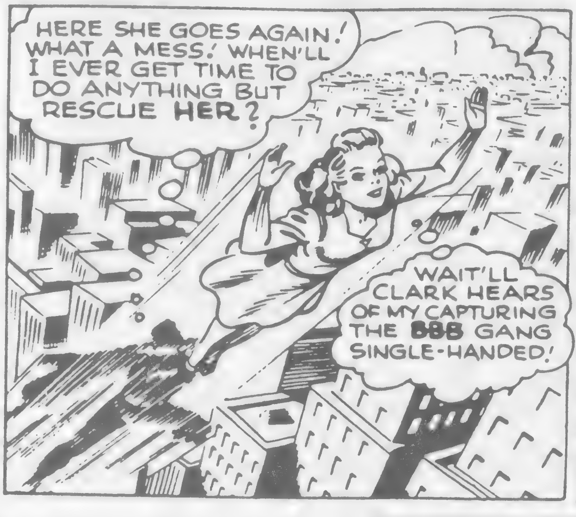
ALVIN: One of Bill's greatest difficulties — as was legendary around comics — he had trouble meeting deadlines. He always had an excuse for being late with a story — I think he had to attend the funerals of at least three grandmothers over the years. I still saw Bill occasionally after I left comics, perhaps for the last time around 1962. In those years, he was having a very hard time. He felt *so* helpless. It was so hard to make a decent living at comics under any conditions. He'd been working on some historical project out on Long Island and came to visit me at my home in Northern Westchester, bringing his little boy with him. Considering his heart problem, I feel the additional stress of trying to survive and support his family, might well have contributed to his premature death. In any case, I understand that it was not too long after that visit that he went out to California and did his TV stint and then suffered his final heart attack. But I only heard about it years later, when, on a visit from Montreal to New York for a short while, I called his former wife, asking about Bill, only to be told that Bill had died eight years ago.

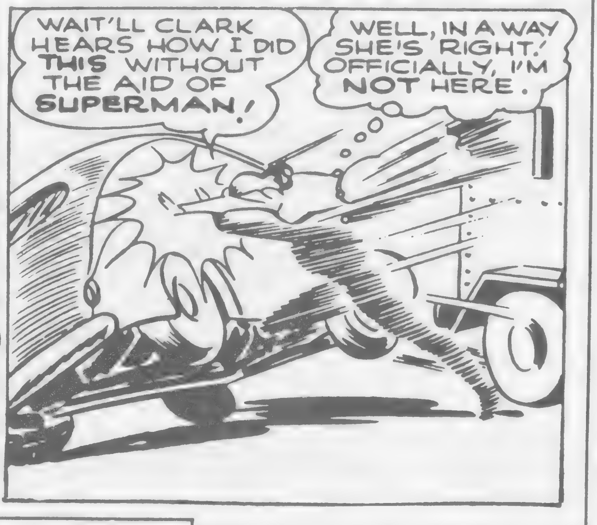
RICH: *What about Don Cameron?*

ALVIN: At the time I first came to DC, he was their top writer. I was very flattered when they saw my early stories and said they had another **Don Cameron** here, because he was the one they tapped to write their top features. He wrote SUPERMAN after **Siegel** was drafted, and backed up **Finger** on BATMAN. We had parallel styles, which was sometimes confusing. He certainly wrote well enough to get out of comics, and I understand he actually did a couple of novels, although I know nothing definite about them.

RICH: *Do you remember anything about the early stories you wrote?*

ALVIN: I wrote Green Arrow, the Newsboy Legion, and several Vigilantes. I remember one about a magic sword in the possession of a Chinese family. The sword rested on a plaque that said something like "The House of Feng is to be Protected by this Sword until its Enemies Are No More" — and when the sword is placed on the plaque, it covers some of the words and then says: "The House of Feng Is No More." I think


HERE SHE GOES AGAIN! WHAT A MESS! WHEN'LL I EVER GET TIME TO DO ANYTHING BUT RESCUE HER?
WAIT'LL CLARK HEARS OF MY CAPTURING THE BBB GANG SINGLE-HANDED!


WAIT'LL CLARK HEARS HOW I DID THIS WITHOUT THE AID OF SUPERMAN!
WELL, IN A WAY SHE'S RIGHT! OFFICIALLY, I'M NOT HERE.

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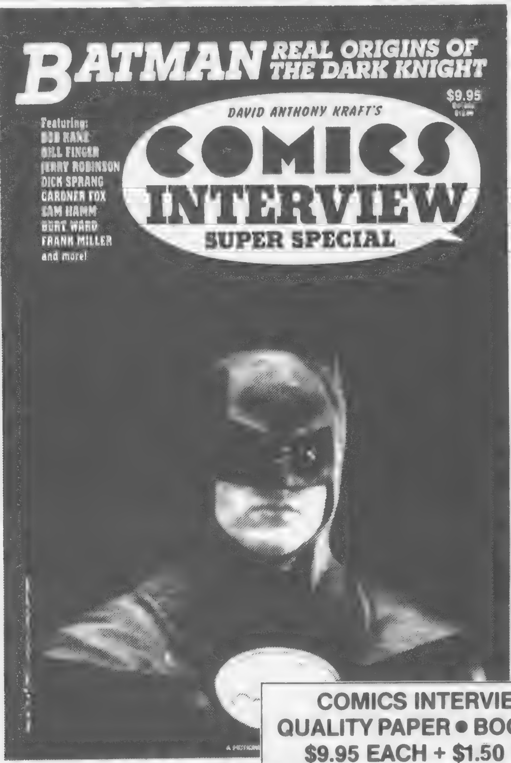
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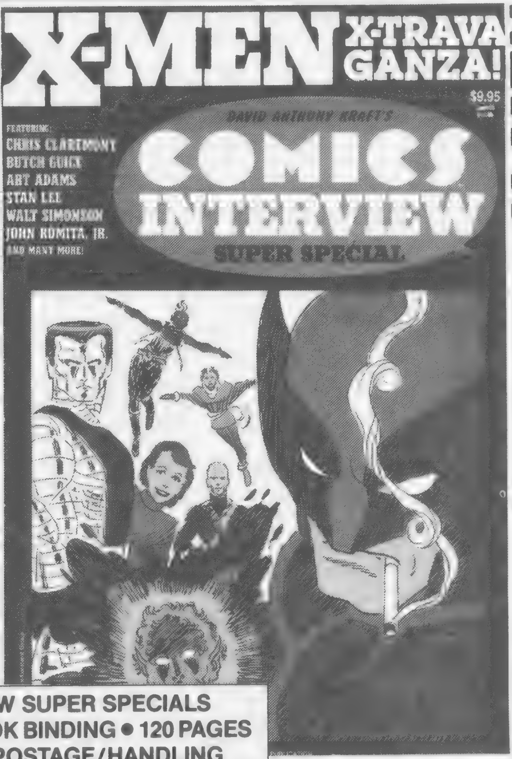
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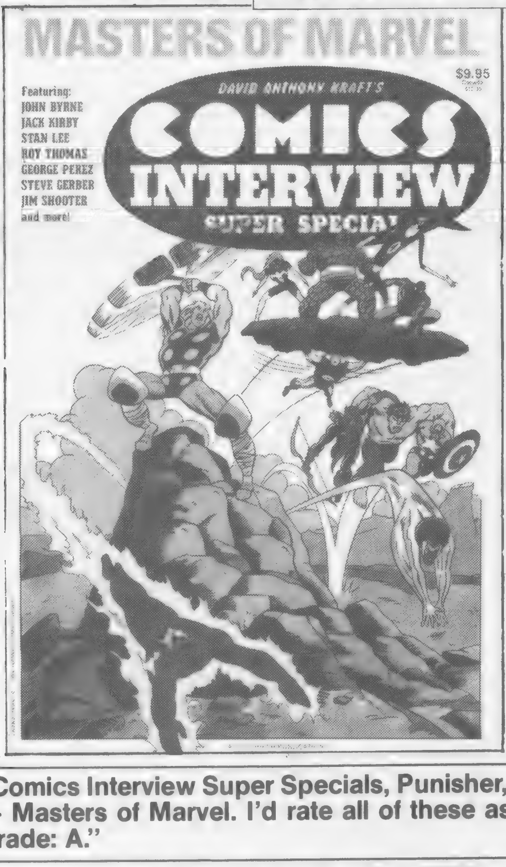
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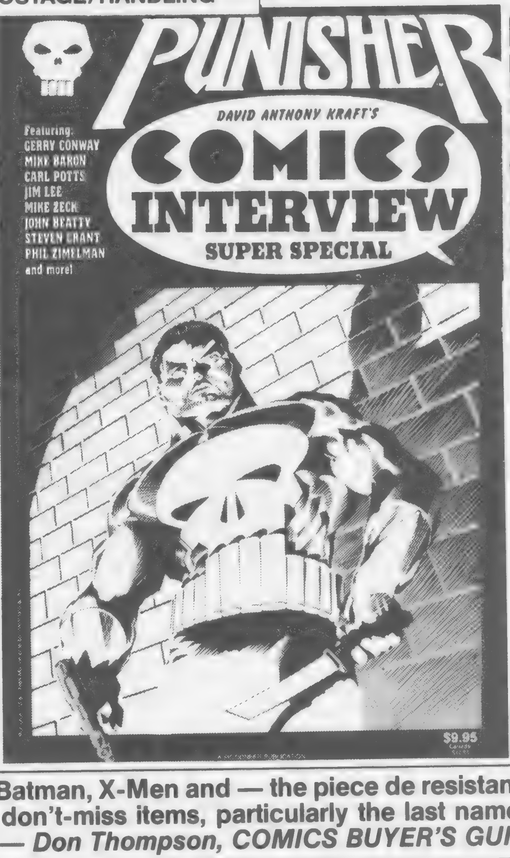
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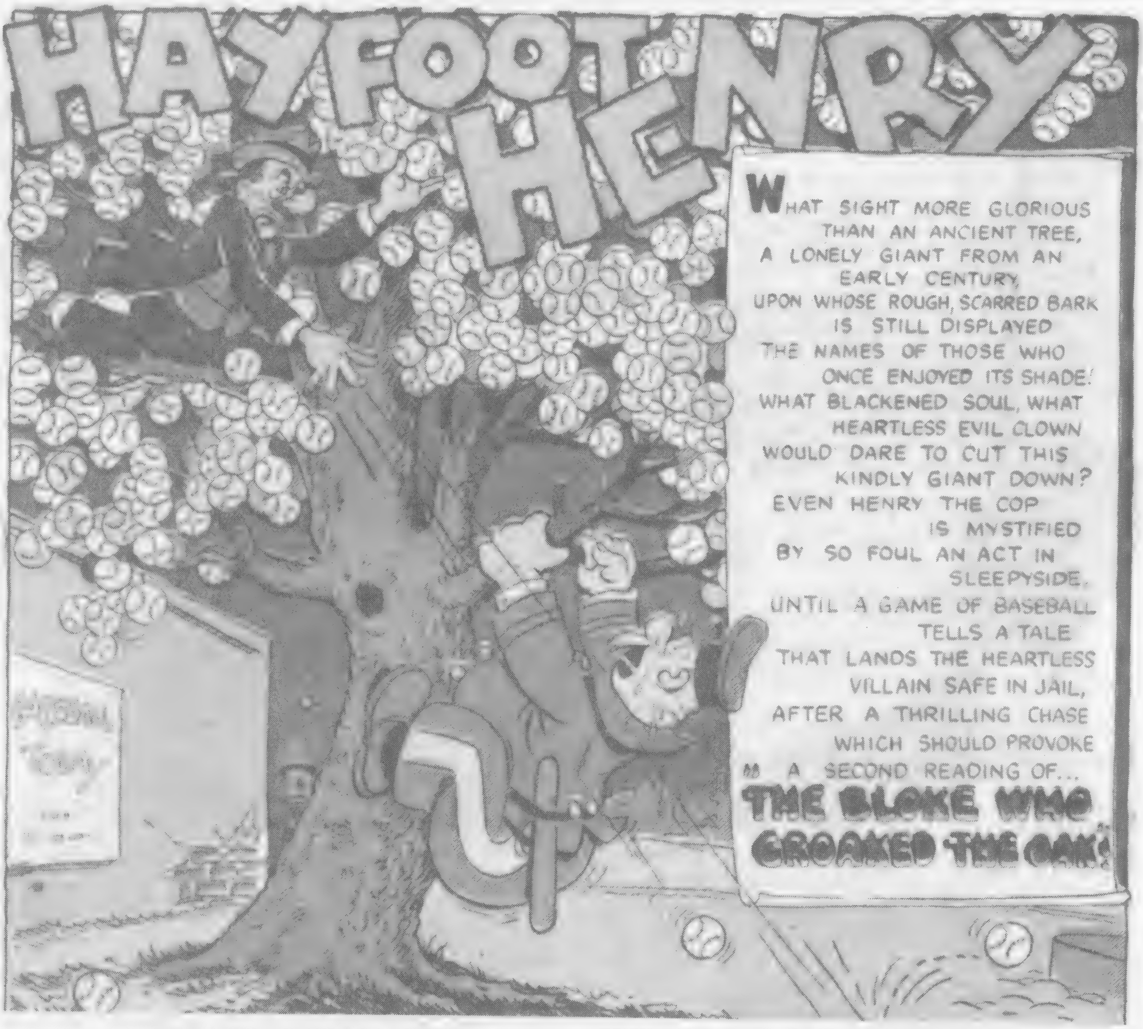
"Do you remember a strip called HAYFOOT HENRY?"


HAYFOOT HENRY
WHAT SIGHT MORE GLORIOUS
THAN AN ANCIENT TREE,
A LONELY GIANT FROM AN
EARLY CENTURY,
UPON WHOSE ROUGH, SCARRED BARK
IS STILL DISPLAYED
THE NAMES OF THOSE WHO
ONCE ENJOYED ITS SHADE!
WHAT BLACKENED SOUL, WHAT
HEARTLESS EVIL CLOWN
WOULD DARE TO CUT THIS
KINDLY GIANT DOWN?
EVEN HENRY THE COP
IS MYSTIFIED
BY SO FOUL AN ACT IN
SLEEPYSIDE,
UNTIL A GAME OF BASEBALL
TELLS A TALE
THAT LANDS THE HEARTLESS
VILLAIN SAFE IN JAIL,
AFTER A THRILLING CHASE
WHICH SHOULD PROVOKE
A SECOND READING OF...
"THE BLOKE WHO
CROAKED THE OAK!"

HAYFOOT HENRY by Alvin, from ACTION COMICS #78 (1944). Art is by Stan Kaye.

Mort Meskin drew that one. *(" Sword of Destiny," ACTION COMICS #66.)*

RICH: *He drew all the early Vigilantes.*

ALVIN: He was one of the best artists to work in comics. Really good work. I also came up with a strip called HOTEL SKYLINE, which centered around the people at a hotel. I believe several were drawn, but they never got published. And do you remember a strip called HAYFOOT HENRY?

RICH: *The humor strip in the back of ACTION COMICS about the cop who always had to find a rhyme for a different word?*

ALVIN: That's the one. I created it and finally abandoned it, because they wouldn't pay me enough for the time it took to do. **Stan Kaye** was the artist.

RICH: *Ron Goulart mentioned that strip in a recent history book about the comics. He said Ray McGill also drew it. Perhaps he was the first artist.*

ALVIN: Well, Stan was the only artist I can remember, but that doesn't mean **McGill** didn't also draw some of the stories. Stan inked most of the SUPERMAN stories **Wayne Boring** pencilled.

RICH: *Goulart mentioned how every story was written entirely in verse. I must admit, though, that he went on to say, "Well, nobody ever said it was good poetry."*

ALVIN: Of course not! I've written serious poems for POETRY MAGAZINE and the like. It was doggerel. But even doggerel can be hard to write on a month-to-month basis. I did all of them except one. That latter one was done by **Don Cameron** after I told **Jack Schiff** I wouldn't do any more without a better rate. So he proceeded to give Don the assignment to do one, without any regard for the fact that it was my strip. Don also found it was too much work, so HAYFOOT HENRY was dropped.

RICH: *Well, the feeling was that it was really DC's strip, since they'd paid for it. Wasn't that the whole issue about Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, with the rights to Superman?*

ALVIN: Well, I can tell you that, as far as I could see, they were treated very well. They got paid far, far more than any other writers or artists, except maybe **Bob Kane** — not **Bill Finger** — on BATMAN. They just decided they wanted to own their character, so they settled with DC and moved on.

RICH: *You'd started writing Superman by then, hadn't you?*

ALVIN: I was writing some of his stories as well as Batman's by 1944. I was getting tired of doing the juvenile comic-book stuff and talked to **Schiff** about leaving. He was kind enough to offer me the

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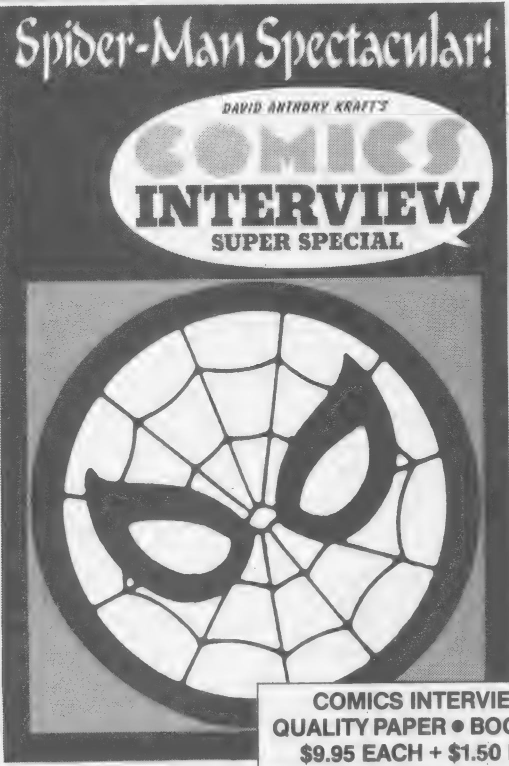
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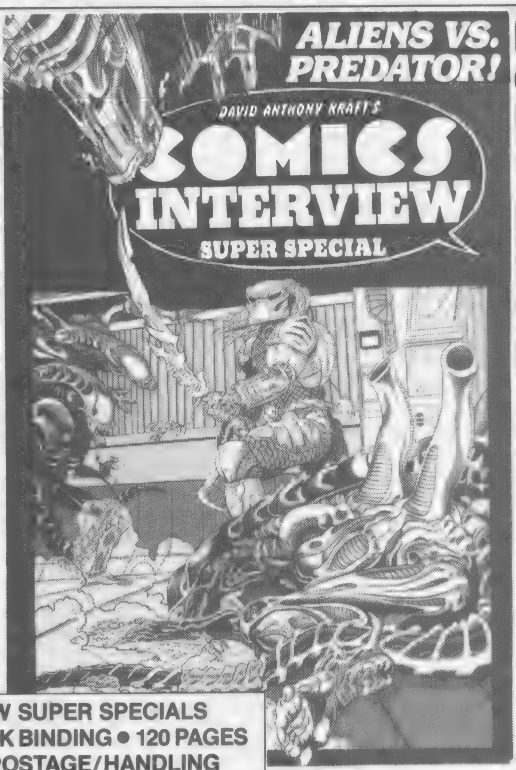
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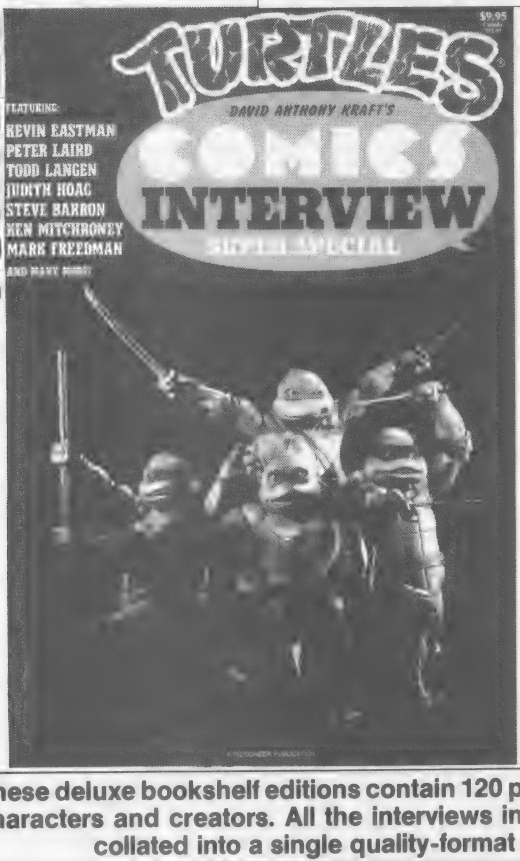
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"I did fewer comic books, concentrating on the strip."

dailies for both SUPERMAN and BATMAN without having to do any of the comic books, so I'd virtually taken them over by the end of 1944.

RICH: *Did you have any particular favorites among your stories?*

ALVIN: Yes, there was the newspaper continuity about the Ogies (1944). The Ogies were odd little creatures, invulnerable and invisible, that hung around Superman and kept making comments that people blamed Superman for. They were actually the same size and shape as the speech balloons themselves.

RICH: *How could you tell? They were invisible.*

ALVIN: But they became visible at the end of the second story. I think I did two stories with them. Sometimes I wonder if **Al Capp** was inspired by them when he created the Shmoos in LI'L ABNER in 1948. And there was also the one a little bit later *(also 1944)* in which a student writes a physics term paper, telling about Superman's extra-physical powers and gets a failing grade. He complains to the professor and shows him a copy of the DAILY PLANET. The headlines say that Superman has moved faster than the speed of light. "So you see," the student says, "It's true. Superman does have extra-physical powers."

The professor answers, "In science, we're not interested in truth. For truth, go to the metaphysics department." I forget how that ended — I think I ended up having Superman take the professor to the moon, or something.

RICH: *He did, or at least he pretended to. But first Superman had himself shut him up in a cyclotron, to try to convince him.*

ALVIN: I remember that! I'd picked the cyclotron up from a 1935 issue of POPULAR MECHANICS. Next thing that happened, Superman disappeared from the newspapers — at least, the one I read — for a while. The FBI had stepped in and censored the strip! My cyclotron had apparently gotten too close to the big project at Oak Ridge. After the war, the press broke the story. I recall one headline in the NEW YORK POST stating, "Superman Had It (The Bomb) First."

RICH: *There was another atomic-power story later that DC said was also censored ("The Battle of the Atoms," SUPERMAN #38) until after the war. Don Cameron wrote it, but on the splash page, it mentioned some articles about your sequence, from TIME and NEWSWEEK. Those revealed that the FBI had actually conducted a security check of Siegel and Shuster, who signed the strip — I guess they didn't even realize you and Wayne Boring were ghosting it. but you and Boring were still doing the strip when Siegel and Shuster left at the beginning of 1948, weren't you?*

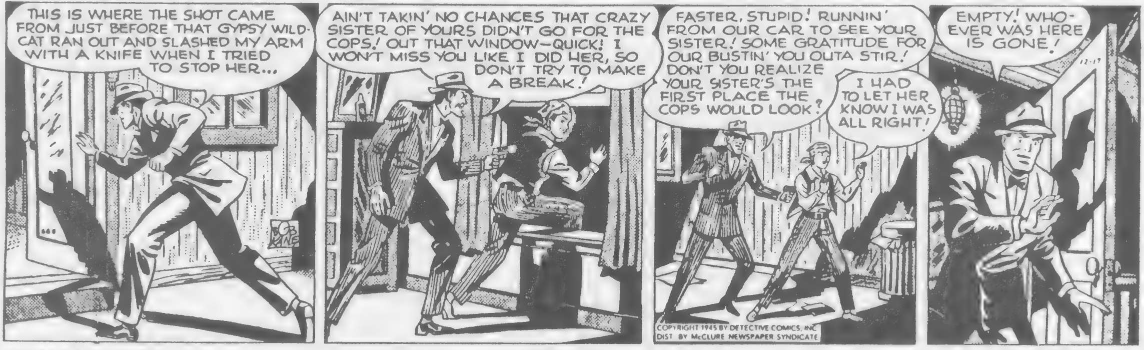
ALVIN: Yes. As I explained, I was doing a lot fewer stories at the time for the comic books, concentrating on the strip. The BATMAN strip was dead by then, so I was doing SUPERMAN daily and Sunday. I enjoyed it because **Jack Schiff** was still editing. **Mort Weisinger** was back from the war by then, and I never liked working for him. And **Don Cameron** absolutely hated him. But because Mort's job was guaranteed, he was given back his seniority, putting him ahead of **Schiff,** to everyone's horror. Don once got so fed up, he tried to push Mort out the window — truly. Later, he said that DC was the only place where you could try to push an editor out the window and they'd still beg you to work for them.

RICH: *I take it you weren't wild about Mort either?*

ALVIN: He was a sad, semi-literate, sneaky, vulgar man, but he made an impression on the front office, DC publishers **Jack Liebowitz** and **Harry Donenfeld,** at the time, because they were impressed by the articles he sold to the slick magazines and thought that that made him an outstanding editor. De-

Here, we begin an eight-day sequence by Alvin, continued over the next two pages.

BATMAN AND ROBIN Deserted Apartment December 17, 1945 • Monday


THIS IS WHERE THE SHOT CAME FROM JUST BEFORE THAT GYPSY WILDCAT RAN OUT AND SLASHED MY ARM WITH A KNIFE WHEN I TRIED TO STOP HER...
AIN'T TAKIN' NO CHANCES THAT CRAZY SISTER OF YOURS DIDN'T GO FOR THE COPS! OUT THAT WINDOW—QUICK! I WON'T MISS YOU LIKE I DID HER, SO DON'T TRY TO MAKE A BREAK!
FASTER, STUPID! RUNNIN' FROM OUR CAR TO SEE YOUR SISTER! SOME GRATITUDE FOR OUR BUSTIN' YOU OUTA STIR! DON'T YOU REALIZE YOUR SISTER'S THE FIRST PLACE THE COPS WOULD LOOK?
I HAD TO LET HER KNOW I WAS ALL RIGHT!
EMPTY! WHOEVER WAS HERE IS GONE!
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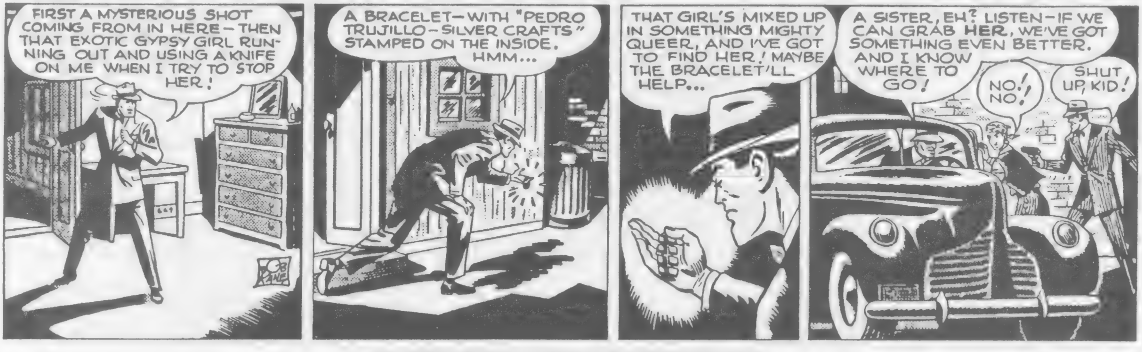
BATMAN AND ROBIN Silvery Clue December 18, 1945 • Tuesday


FIRST A MYSTERIOUS SHOT COMING FROM IN HERE—THEN THAT EXOTIC GYPSY GIRL RUNNING OUT AND USING A KNIFE ON ME WHEN I TRY TO STOP HER!
A BRACELET—WITH "PEDRO TRUJILLO—SILVER CRAFTS" STAMPED ON THE INSIDE. HMM...
THAT GIRL'S MIXED UP IN SOMETHING MIGHTY QUEER, AND I'VE GOT TO FIND HER! MAYBE THE BRACELET'LL HELP...
A SISTER, EH? LISTEN—IF WE CAN GRAB HER, WE'VE GOT SOMETHING EVEN BETTER. AND I KNOW WHERE TO GO!
NO! NO!
SHUT UP, KID!

"There is a metaphysical aspect to Superman that isn't in

lightfully enough, there was the day Mort was brutally lampooned in THE NEW YORKER by **S.J. Perelman,** who described his writing style as something like a big bowling ball that goes trundling heavily down the aisle. Mort came into the office with it, beaming and proud, telling everyone how he'd won himself a big writeup in THE NEW YORKER. Everyone else had seen the article and was convulsed at Mort's total inability to understand what the article was saying.

(In the course of events, Alvin and I had arrived at SunCon, and were escorted to a dealer's table. He introduced me to his old friend, pulp writer Ryerson Johnson.)

Johnny, on the other hand, is incapable of saying anything negative about anybody. Except **Bush** and **Reagan.**

RYERSON JOHNSON: Well, Mort was a friend of mine. I didn't mind knowing him, but I don't think I'd ever want to work for him again. But I remember the time around 1960 that Mort took me to a party in Hollywood. This was when they were working on the SUPERBOY series that never got off the ground, and a man came up to me, right out of the blue, and said, "I hope you don't want to write SUPERBOY. It's all arranged — I'm writing all the SUPERBOYs." I don't even remember his name.

RICH: *Was it Robert Leslie Bellem? He wrote quite a few of those.*

RYERSON: No, not **Bellem.** I don't recall who he was, though.

(I wandered around the dealer's room for a while, coming back with some old comic books I thought Schwartz may have worked on. I showed one of them, SUPERMAN #51, to Alvin.)

ALVIN: *(Looking at the lead story, "Mr. Mxyztplk Seeks a Wife," and laughing)* Yes, I remember this one. It's mine. I did about three or four stories with Mr. Mxyztplk.

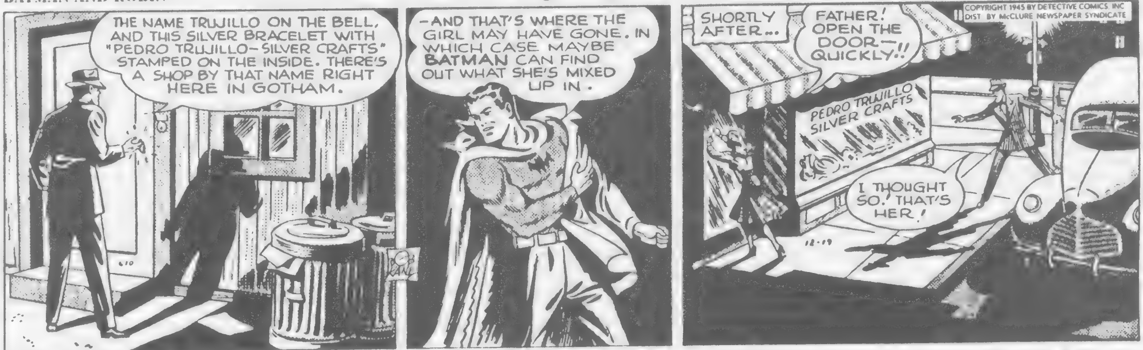
RYERSON: Who's that?

ALVIN: Don't you remember him? Mr. Mxyztplk, the imp from the fifth dimension. He was always playing magic practical jokes on Superman, and the only way to get rid of him was to get him to to say his name backwards.

RICH: *Is that how you pronounced his name? "Mix-ist-a-plick?"*

ALVIN: We all, did, yes. I'm not surprised Johnny didn't remember him, since I doubt Mxyztplk stayed around after Mort came back. He wasn't Mort's

BATMAN AND ROBIN — A Daughter's Appeal — December 19, 1945 • Wednesday


THE NAME TRUJILLO ON THE BELL, AND THIS SILVER BRACELET WITH "PEDRO TRUJILLO—SILVER CRAFTS" STAMPED ON THE INSIDE. THERE'S A SHOP BY THAT NAME RIGHT HERE IN GOTHAM.
670
BOB KANE
—AND THAT'S WHERE THE GIRL MAY HAVE GONE. IN WHICH CASE MAYBE BATMAN CAN FIND OUT WHAT SHE'S MIXED UP IN.
SHORTLY AFTER...
FATHER! OPEN THE DOOR—QUICKLY!!
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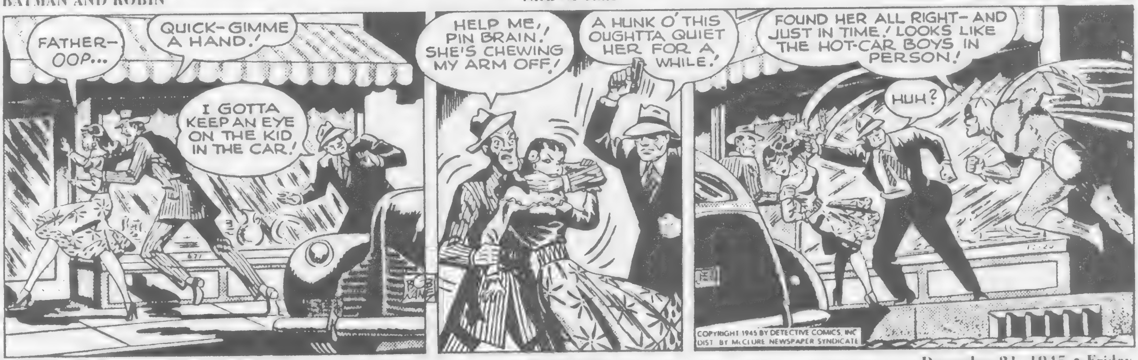
PEDRO TRUJILLO SILVER CRAFTS
I THOUGHT SO. THAT'S HER!
12-19

BATMAN AND ROBIN — Nick Of Time — December 20, 1945 • Thursday


FATHER—OOP...
QUICK—GIMME A HAND!
I GOTTA KEEP AN EYE ON THE KID IN THE CAR!
671
BOB KANE
HELP ME, PIN BRAIN! SHE'S CHEWING MY ARM OFF!
A HUNK O' THIS OUGHTTA QUIET HER FOR A WHILE!
FOUND HER ALL RIGHT—AND JUST IN TIME! LOOKS LIKE THE HOT-CAR BOYS IN PERSON!
HUH?
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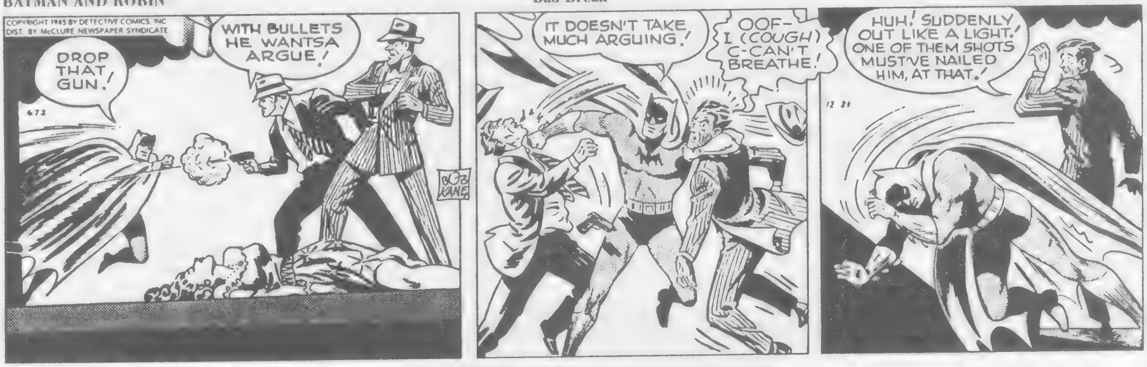
BATMAN AND ROBIN — Bad Break — December 21, 1945 • Friday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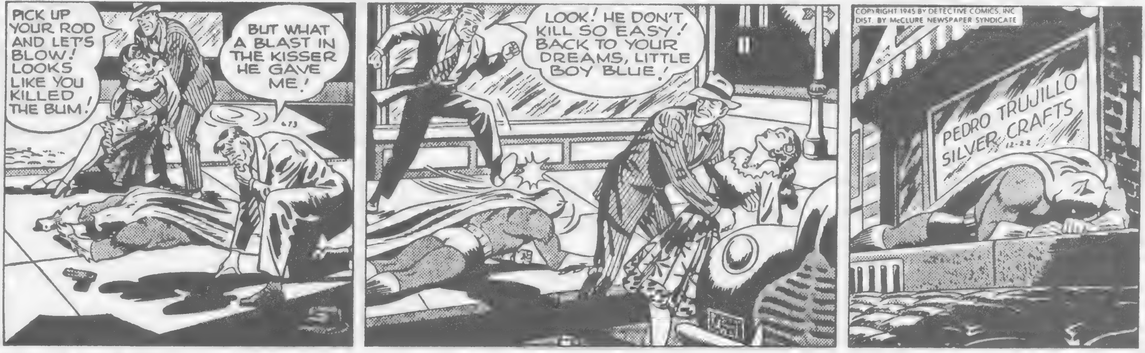
WITH BULLETS HE WANTSA ARGUE!
DROP THAT GUN!
672
BOB KANE
IT DOESN'T TAKE MUCH ARGUING!
OOF—I (COUGH) C-CAN'T BREATHE!
HUH! SUDDENLY OUT LIKE A LIGHT! ONE OF THEM SHOTS MUST'VE NAILED HIM, AT THAT!
12 21

Batman unless you stretch the bat into day/night polarity.”

BATMAN AND ROBIN Left For Dead December 22, 1945 • Saturday


PICK UP YOUR ROD AND LET'S BLOW! LOOKS LIKE YOU KILLED THE BUM!
BUT WHAT A BLAST IN THE KISSER HE GAVE ME!
LOOK! HE DON'T KILL SO EASY! BACK TO YOUR DREAMS, LITTLE BOY BLUE!
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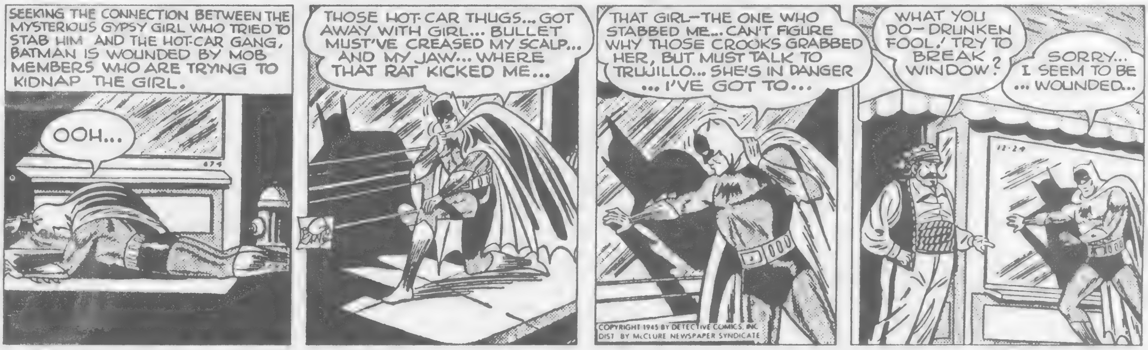
PEDRO TRUJILLO SILVER CRAFTS

BATMAN AND ROBIN Wounded Warrior December 24, 1945 • Monday


SEEKING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE MYSTERIOUS GYPSY GIRL WHO TRIED TO STAB HIM AND THE HOT-CAR GANG, BATMAN IS WOUNDED BY MOB MEMBERS WHO ARE TRYING TO KIDNAP THE GIRL.
OOH...
THOSE HOT-CAR THUGS... GOT AWAY WITH GIRL... BULLET MUST'VE CREASED MY SCALP... AND MY JAW... WHERE THAT RAT KICKED ME...
THAT GIRL—THE ONE WHO STABBED ME... CAN'T FIGURE WHY THOSE CROOKS GRABBED HER, BUT MUST TALK TO TRUJILLO... SHE'S IN DANGER ... I'VE GOT TO...
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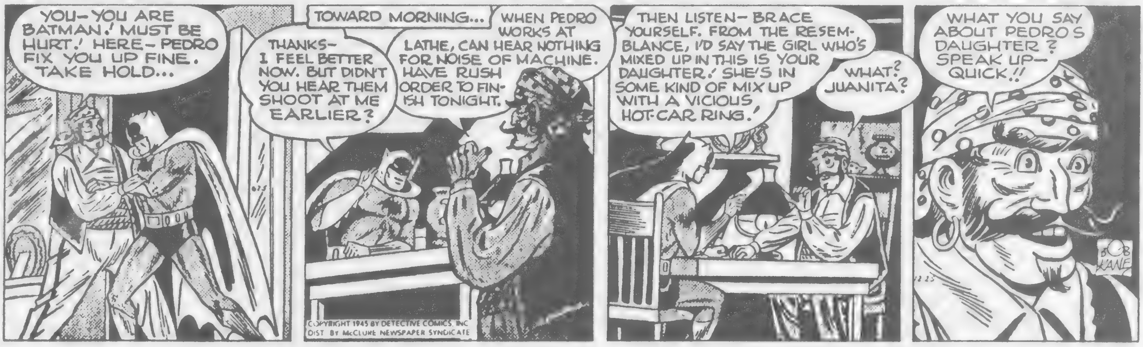
WHAT YOU DO—DRUNKEN FOOL! TRY TO BREAK WINDOW?
SORRY... I SEEM TO BE ... WOUNDED...

BATMAN AND ROBIN A Shock For Father December 25, 1945 • Tuesday


YOU—YOU ARE BATMAN! MUST BE HURT! HERE—PEDRO FIX YOU UP FINE. TAKE HOLD...
TOWARD MORNING...
THANKS—I FEEL BETTER NOW. BUT DIDN'T YOU HEAR THEM SHOOT AT ME EARLIER?
WHEN PEDRO WORKS AT LATHE, CAN HEAR NOTHING FOR NOISE OF MACHINE. HAVE RUSH ORDER TO FINISH TONIGHT.
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THEN LISTEN—BRACE YOURSELF. FROM THE RESEMBLANCE, I'D SAY THE GIRL WHO'S MIXED UP IN THIS IS YOUR DAUGHTER! SHE'S IN SOME KIND OF MIX UP WITH A VICIOUS HOT-CAR RING!
WHAT? JUANITA?
WHAT YOU SAY ABOUT PEDRO'S DAUGHTER? SPEAK UP—QUICK!!
BOB KANE

kind of character.

RICH: *Actually, he did — but I've heard Mort only spelled out the first four letters of his name. That's probably why the name's spelling got changed — it was Mxyzptlk ("Mix-yez-pitel-ick") after that. I always thought he was a classic example of the trickster motif — he was literally said in a couple of stories to be descended from both Loki and Merlin.*

ALVIN: Yes, he easily slips into the category of The Shadow — not the pulp character — or The Trickster — Jungian archetypes. Far more so than Batman's Joker, since there is a metaphysical dimension to Superman that isn't present in Batman except by stretching the bat imagery into some sort of daytime/nighttime polarity — so that we touch the antipodes of being. But stretch it too far and we're playing intellectual games. I know there's been a tendency to do this with movies, as though intellectuals needed to trick out the relaxing dip into the vulgar by providing it with some sort of cosmic underpinning. And now, I see, it's been happening with comics, too.

Only thing I'll allow is the fact that Mxyztplk kept his eponymous spelling as long as **Jack Schiff,** a confirmed rationalist, remained in charge. As soon as Jack turned his back, the sneaky fifth-dimensional imp changed the spelling of his name. **Jack Schiff,** always rational, would probably say he disagrees with me. He's simply a natural-born good speller.

RICH: *Comics historian Jim Steranko noticed that there was a lot more humor in general in the SUPERMAN comics from around 1943 on. He thought Mort Weisinger might have been responsible for that.*

ALVIN: No, that's completely wrong. Mort's sense of humor was as undeveloped as his character. His highest humor took the form of scatological jokes of the kind we used to exchange in the early years of elementary school. He also spent much of his time trying to get **Jack Schiff** in trouble later on, especially during the **McCarthy** days — telling everyone that Jack's liberalism meant he was a Red, even going to **Whitney Ellsworth** with it. But Whit, who was a true New England conservative, would have no part of such smears.

I think the humor came from **Don Cameron,** from myself, and from Whit. Mort didn't understand humor. He tried

“Batman never killed in the comics, did he? I thought

to suppress it unless he'd already heard of it on radio or TV or some outside source, and then he'd try to copy it. Consider that when Whit could come into the office and say, “How long can grown men continue to do this shit?” it becomes easy to see that we grown men managed to handle it by lightening our characters, by introducing elements of whimsy and comedy. Anyway, Whit had the final say, and mostly it was to keep Mort off the backs of others.

RICH: *Steranko used the cover of this issue as an example.* (SUPERMAN #51's cover shows Lois Lane taking a tray of biscuits out of the oven. The quality of the biscuits can be surmised from the fact that one of them has fallen onto Superman's foot, apparently causing him to hop around in pain.)

ALVIN: Good example of Mort's heavy humor. *(Grin.)* That must have been a **Bill Finger** story.

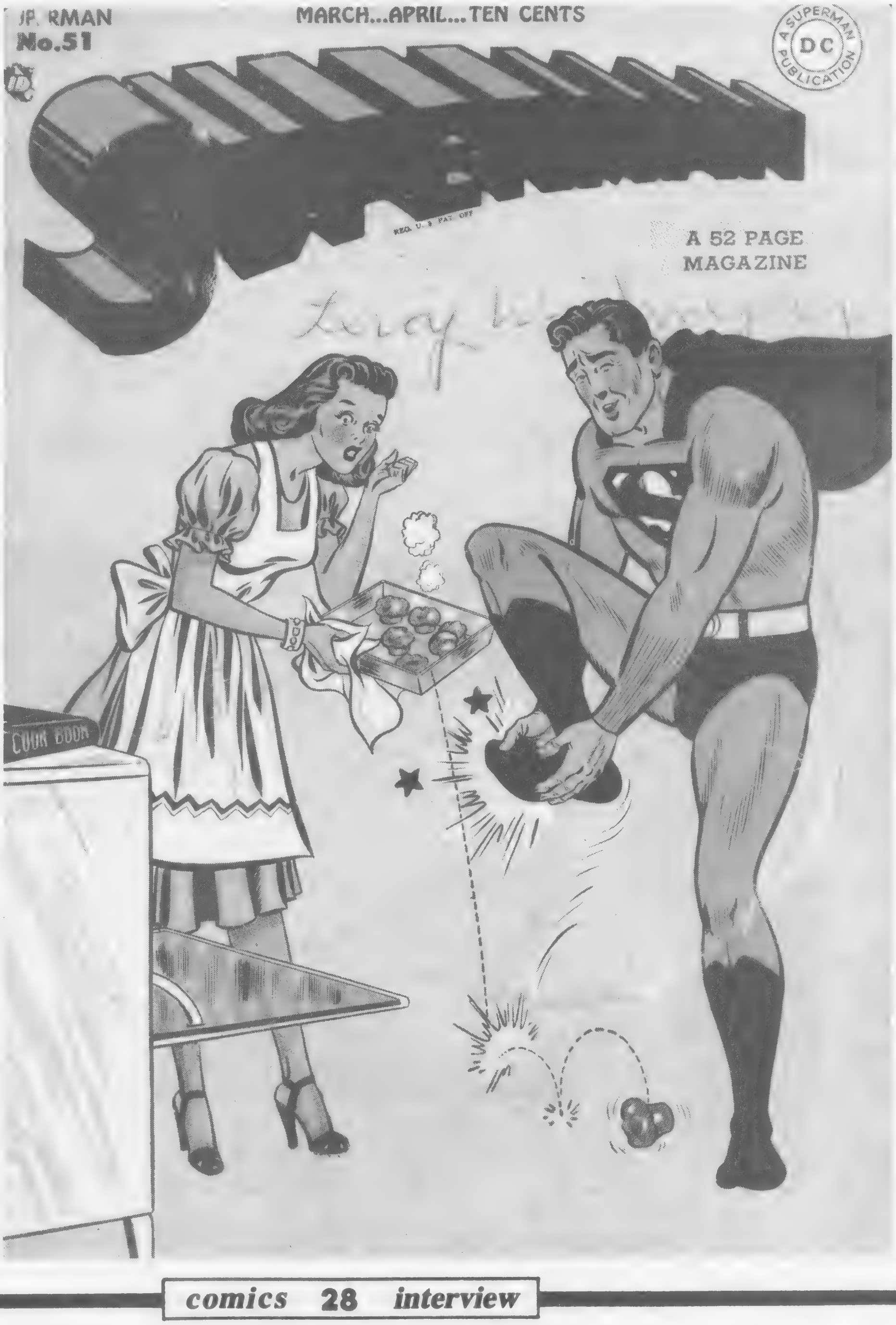
RICH: (Looking through the issue) *Actually, it isn't any story in the issue. It's just a gag cover.*

ALVIN: Well, I'm sure it was still Bill's idea. His wife cooked just like that.

FAN: (Stopping by the table) *Excuse me, Mr. Schwartz. Did you have any stories in this issue?* (Passes over a copy of BATMAN #29.)

ALVIN: Ask this man *(indicating me).* He knows more about what I wrote than I do.

RICH: *Actually, my friend Martin*



Here: The very cover discussed above. Next page: More from “Lois Lane, Superwoman.”

it was a mistake when he seemed to kill in the movie.”

O'Hearn is the real writing expert. He's studied the styles of every comics writer whose work has been identified, especially at Golden and Silver Age DC, and knows the favorite expressions and nuances. But he's told me enough so I can sometimes spot them . . . this one looks like Bill Finger. This one (pointing to the last story, “The Mails Go Through”) *might be yours.*

ALVIN: It might be. This one about the mailman? Yes, I think I remember this bit, where the woman makes the footsore mailman climb five flights of stairs, and then tells her son he'll take the little boy away unless he eats his vegetables. That was a gag blatantly lifted from an old **Harold Lloyd** movie.

RICH: *One thing Martin noticed about your writing is that you used a lot more periods than most people did. In those days, most of the other writers ended almost every sentence with an exclamation point. But a few of your stories, like “Lois Lane, Superwoman”* (SUPERMAN #45) *and “The Crazy Crime Clown”* (BATMAN #74) have almost no periods at all.

ALVIN: I really had nothing against exclamation points. But my typewriter did! During those earlier years, I had one of those machines where, in order to type an exclamation point, it was necessary to hit an apostrophe, then backspace and put a period under it. Too much work when you're going fast. Much easier to hit a period. Of course, there were times when I'd turn out something right in the DC bullpen where the typewriters were properly equipped with exclamation points, so I'd use them. And later on, when I changed machines and could make my own exclamation points, I used them like everyone else. Simple when you can remember it — *n'est-ce pas?*

(We later bade our farewells to Johnny, and got in the van to return to the Schwartz home.)

ALVIN: As I've noticed that many of the fans these days seem more interested in Batman than in Superman. I'd have thought it'd be the other way around.

RICH: *Batman's definitely more popular. It's partly because of the movie, of course — but also because he's more grounded in the real world. It's easier in a lot of ways to identify with him.*

ALVIN: I see the reason for his appeal. You saw the article I did about him in the Kitchen Sink volume. *(“Batman — Backward Looking and Forward Leaning,” in BATMAN: THE SUNDAY CLASSICS) What was the reaction to that?*

RICH: *Well, some people thought it was rather pedantic, but it's also gotten some good reaction. I know you were trying to approach him from a different angle.*

ALVIN: They're not using Robin very much anymore, and he's not in the movies, either. I always thought he'd really work better alone.

RICH: *That seems to be the consensus, though they still use him sometimes. They've had three Robins by now — Dick Grayson is grown up and calls himself Nightwing now, and there was a second Robin who was killed by the Joker. The present one is named Tim Drake.*

ALVIN: They've never had Batman kill anyone in the comic books, have they? I thought it was a mistake when he seemed to kill in the movie — that's going too far.

RICH: *No, though he's come close. It's a much darker vision these days, since his very existence was due to street crime. You know the origin, of course.*

ALVIN: Actually, I don't recall. Not the way it was told in the comics, at least.

RICH: *It shows how things have changed! These days they retell it almost every month, or at least it seems like it. Bruce Wayne's parents were shot when they were taking him home from a movie, by a crook named Joe Chill. I think Bill Finger got the name from a Raymond Chandler short story called “Spanish Blood.”*

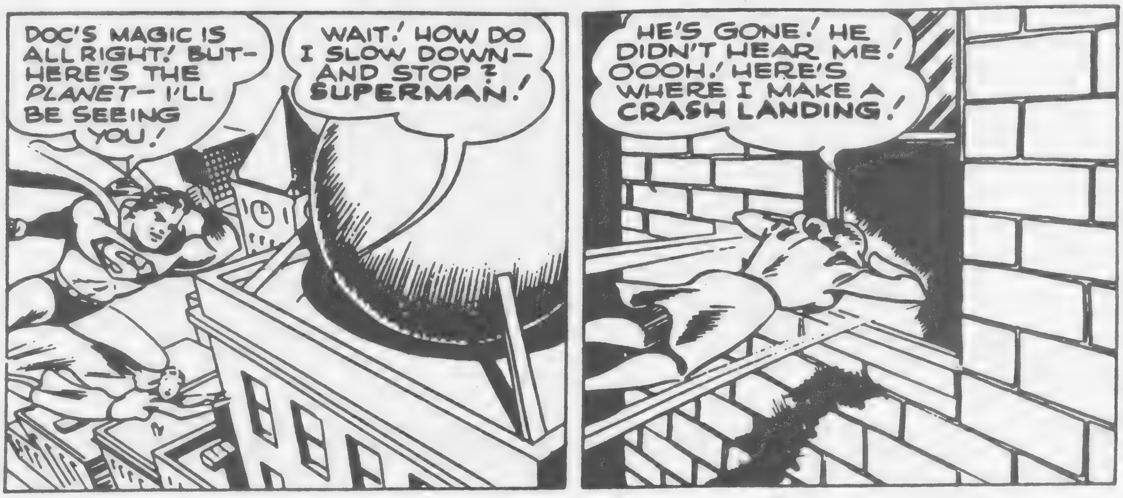
The interesting thing is, they tell it differently from time to time. These days they focus heavily on the tragedy it caused in Bruce Wayne's life, and some writers seem to think it warped his mind to an extent. But in the '40s they were playing it down. They made Bruce look older — well into his teens — when it happened, and they said Joe Chill only shot Bruce's father. His mother died from a heart attack the shock brought on. I never saw the point of changing that. Chill was the villain, after all.

ALVIN: Well, maybe they didn't want to have a woman shot.

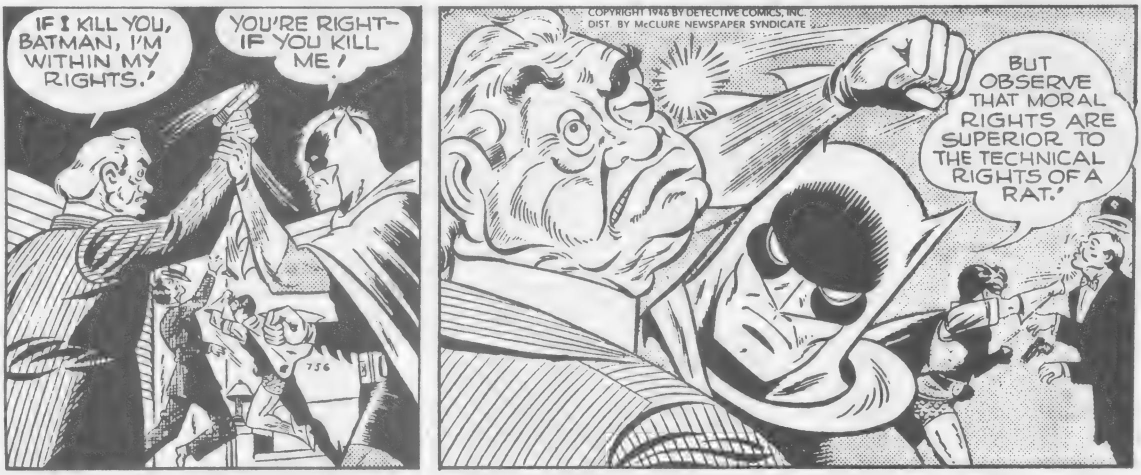
RICH: *I don't see why it's any worse to kill a woman in cold blood than it is to kill a man.*

ALVIN: You'd never make it in the Mafia!

RICH: *In any case, you know they're going to be doing a reprint book of Batman stories with the Penguin and the Catwoman, since they're the two villains in the new movie? I think they're using one of yours, where the Joker and the Penguin team up?* (“Knights of Knavery,” BATMAN #25) *It was already reprinted in THE GREATEST BATMAN STORIES EVER TOLD, so I wonder why they don't run another villain team-up story?* (NOTE: This story has since been replaced, for that very reason.) *I*


DOC'S MAGIC IS ALL RIGHT! BUT— HERE'S THE PLANET— I'LL BE SEEING YOU!
WAIT! HOW DO I SLOW DOWN— AND STOP? SUPERMAN!
HE'S GONE! HE DIDN'T HEAR ME! OOOH! HERE'S WHERE I MAKE A CRASH LANDING!

“I decided on a pseudonym to match the bills, and used


IF I KILL YOU, BATMAN, I'M WITHIN MY RIGHTS.'
YOU'RE RIGHT— IF YOU KILL ME!
756
COPYRIGHT 1948 BY DETECTIVE COMICS, INC. DIST. BY McCLURE NEWSPAPER SYNDICATE
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think there was one in BATMAN #2 or #3 with the Joker and the Catwoman.

ALVIN: I did one, in the newspaper strip. Or at least one with the Joker and a very similar character.

RICH: *Yes, the Sparrow.* (Sunday, late 1945) *Strangely enough, I've noticed that the Sparrow made an onstage appearance in the second strip of that sequence as originally published. When it was reprinted in the '60s, she was moved offstage, so we didn't learn she was female until the Joker did. Was that the way you intended it?*

ALVIN: Of course I deliberately kept the Sparrow's sex secret until she appeared. Why else would I deliberately have put a masculine pronoun in the Joker's mouth? In a newspaper strip, you always had to milk it for little surprises and cliffhangers.

RICH: *One thing I wondered about is that, for its first decade, the SUPERMAN newspaper strip carried the names of its writer and artist — Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. But after they left DC, they used the name of the actual artist — Wayne Boring — but no writer's name. Didn't you mind that?*

ALVIN: Not at all. I didn't even put my real name on my manuscripts, since I preferred to keep them hidden from my literary friends.

RICH: *You didn't?*

ALVIN: No. When I started writing comics, I'd just moved into my first wife's place. Her name was **Vivien Woodrum,** and the electric bills were still in her name, coming addressed to **"V. Woodrum." Henry Miller,** incidentally, thought she was one of the greatest psychics he ever ran across.

RICH: *What was he like?*

ALVIN: A very charming man, personally — I wasn't crazy about his writing, although some of his later non-fiction stuff was interesting. I also helped his close personal friend, **Anais Nin,** type up sections of her diary. But we didn't get along too well — possibly, among other things, because I didn't have a very positive feeling about her writing — in spite of the praise by **Edmund Wilson,** whose attitude may have been more influenced by intimacy than literature.

RICH: *You travelled in quite distinctive literary circles!*

ALVIN: Those were the least distinctive, but I guess — on the whole — yes. And most of them were disdainful of comics and pop culture in general. So I decided, why not come up with a pseudonym to match the electric bills, and used the name **Vernon Woodrum.** It wasn't just for comics. I had also been publishing stories in various Condé Nast magazines, with titles such as "Detoured Sweetheart," as well as fillers for the DC books, which were two-page prose short stories required by some ordinance or other before second-class mail privileges could be granted.

Anyway, one day, I went to a shop somewhere to buy myself a piano, and since I couldn't pay the whole shot on my comic-book earnings, the salesman was considering setting up an installment account. I remember when he looked at me with his warm gravy eyes half submerged in the shine of his spectacles, and said, "What are you oinin', Voinan?" (What are you earning, Vernon?) You see, I was **Vernon Woodrum** then, too. Especially because good old Vernon had a better credit rating than that old deadbeat, **Alvin Schwartz.** Even my driver's license said **Vernon Woodrum.** Anyway, that set me off and I created a character in a Superman story, who went around saying things to his friend Vernon, such as "Hey — the house is boinin', Voinan." Or, "The room is toinin', Voinan." And so on, ad nauseum. *("Just an Ordinary Guy," ACTION COMICS #113.)*

RICH: *And here I'd wondered if DC was afraid crediting a complete team might cause them to defect again and create their own strip, the way Siegel and Shuster had when they went off and did the short-lived FUNNYMAN for another syndicate. Quite a few others had done the same thing around that time, like Milton Caniff, who'd just left TERRY AND THE PIRATES, which he didn't own, to create STEVE CANYON, which he did.*

ALVIN: Actually, **Wayne Boring** and I did consider it. We enjoyed working together, and came up with an idea called JULIUS THE BUG, which was about a bug who lived on a dungheap. It would have been a new idea, to have a funny animal strip drawn in Wayne's supra-realistic style. The bugs would use human castoffs to build their town. But nothing ever came of it.

RICH: *There was a strip something like that in the Disney comics, called BUCKY BUG. Interestingly enough, it was also done in rhyme, just like HAYFOOT HENRY. But it was drawn in the usual Disney style.*

ALVIN: Yes, this would have been different. But nothing came of it. Wayne and I enjoyed the SUPERMAN strip quite a bit in those days. There was one story I put my dog into — a terrier mix named Angus.

RICH: *I remember that one!* (1948, Sunday) *Angus was a little boy's dog who discovered he could talk.*

ALVIN: And also fly. He really could! **Jackson Pollock's** pet crow taught him how. My wife and I lived in Springs, East

the name Vernon Woodrum. It wasn't just for comics."

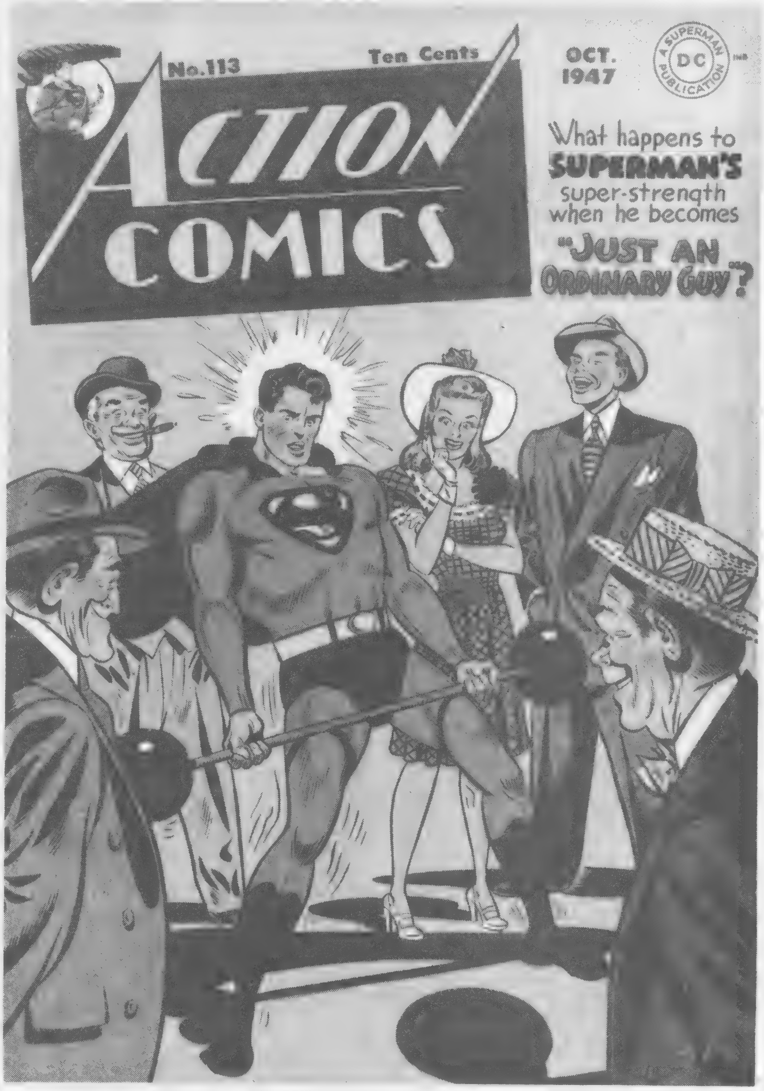
Hampton, Long Island, not far from **Pollock** and another artist who recently died — **Robert Motherwell. Pollock** lived close to a small bay known as Accabonic Creek — I'm not sure of the spelling. But I lived on the other side of it. So Caw-Caw had to fly across the Accabonic every afternoon at four precisely to get the piece of salami I had for him and to give Angus his flying lesson. Angus would rush for Caw-Caw, who would flap his wings and land, out of reach, on a ledge in front of the house. Angus began to flap his whole body after a time as though, by duplicating the movement of Caw-Caw's wings, he could fly to the ledge too. He never made it, I'm afraid.

RICH: *You know a lot of people in the art community?*

ALVIN: I wrote a novel about it — which was sold to Random House. But when my editor, **Hiram Haydon,** also a novelist of some renown, left Random House, they dropped the project. Anyway, that whole group of artists, **Pollock** and **Motherwell** and **Bill de Kooning** and **Bob deNiro,** who never became as well known as the others but was one of the best of the lot. Better than **Pollock,** really. His wife, Virginia, also an artist, scrimped and saved to send son Bobby to acting school, and he's now the well known actor **Robert deNiro, Jr.** As for **Pollock,** another artist who owed much to his wife, the very fine but less well-recognized artist, **Lee Krasner,** well, **Pollock** had some interesting graphic ideas, but he also had a bad drinking problem — he's the only person I've known who could get completely smashed on half a glass of beer. But he showed me how to eat clams, by burying them in cornmeal and letting them soak it up. **Motherwell** was a wealthy man — by inheritance — and had a house especially built there for him by an architect of some note. The house was much discussed by all of us, writers and painters, along with its many architectural features. Also present at that time was **Harold Rosenberg,** later to become the art critic for the NEW YORKER. Harold had an extraordinary influence on **Motherwell.** Guided his thought and managed by sheer force of personality to play a major role in what **Motherwell** was producing.

RICH: *Do you have any art by these people?*

ALVIN: That's a sad story. **Pollock** did some sketches for me once, but I had to sell them in the lean times toward the end of the '50s just to get by. And another time, **Bill de Kooning** was tossing off some preliminary sketches for some paintings he was planning, and then tossing them in the wastebasket. **Paul Goodman,** with whom I'd gone to the studio on that occasion, asked if he could have the sketches, and Bill said, of course he could. I wish I'd thought to ask if I could have just one. My son still has some of **Bob deNiro Sr.'s** art on his walls.


No.113
Ten Cents
ACTION COMICS
OCT. 1947
A SUPERMAN DC PUBLICATION
What happens to SUPERMAN'S super-strength when he becomes "JUST AN ORDINARY GUY"?

Cover from ACTION COMICS #113, October, 1947.

RICH: *Getting back to the comics, were you doing anything else by the late '40s?*

ALVIN: Mostly just the strips, and some SUPERMAN and occasional BATMAN stories. At first I did a lot of BUZZY and A DATE WITH JUDY, both teenage humor strips.

RICH: *A DATE WITH JUDY was based on a radio show, wasn't it? The few I have are copyrighted to someone named Aleen Leslie. I guess she was the writer of the show.*

ALVIN: I really enjoyed doing that strip, because of my nostalgia for a little Cincinnati suburb called Avondale, where I spent my early junior high and high school years at a great little school of 750 called Walnut Hills High. During the four years I lived there, it was probably the best time of my early adolescence — 11 to 14, and Cupcake Center (where both series were set) was almost a replica of it. Almost a dream version of the middle class American dream — for kids. But they took it away from me because they needed me on "more important stuff," and gave it to a guy named **Hal Seeger.**

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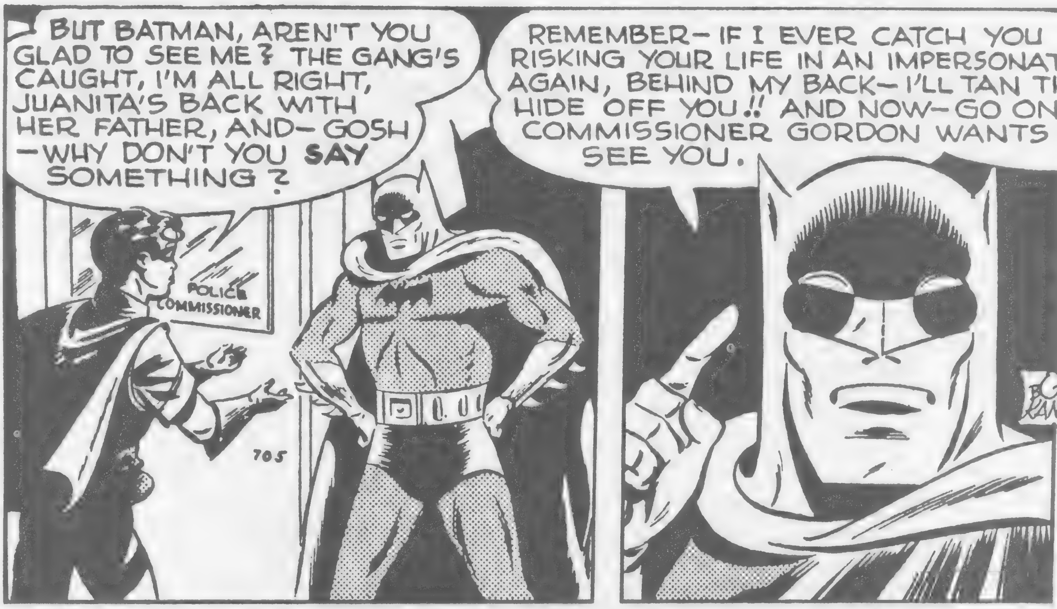
"I never wrote for Marvel, though they were around then."


BUT BATMAN, AREN'T YOU GLAD TO SEE ME? THE GANG'S CAUGHT, I'M ALL RIGHT, JUANITA'S BACK WITH HER FATHER, AND—GOSH—WHY DON'T YOU SAY SOMETHING?
POLICE COMMISSIONER
705
REMEMBER—IF I EVER CATCH YOU RISKING YOUR LIFE IN AN IMPERSONATION AGAIN, BEHIND MY BACK—I'LL TAN THE HIDE OFF YOU!! AND NOW—GO ON IN. COMMISSIONER GORDON WANTS TO SEE YOU.
BOB KANE

RICH: *And this was also around the time you sold your first serious novel.*

ALVIN: Yes, a reviewer called THE BLOWTOP (1948) "probably the first conscious Existentialist novel in America." It was about some people in the Greenwich Village art community, one of whom, in the novel, killed a pot supplier. But there was an editorial feud at the publisher, and because of the murder, the new editor gave it a dust jacket that made it look like a detective story, which it wasn't. It still got good reviews, but didn't sell at all well. Except in France, where it was a best seller.

RICH: *I've read it. You seem to have put a few of the people you knew in it. The main character is Archie Grau, which isn't too far from Alvin Schwartz, since Grau means "gray" in German, and Schwartz means "black." And his friend Fred Birnley has almost the same last name as Jack Burnley, who drew most of your BATMAN Sundays.*

ALVIN: Sheer coincidence. There was a real person, completely unconnected with comics, after whom I named Archie Grau.

RICH: *What's definitely an even stranger coincidence is that the murderer is an artist named Giordano — and there was a comic-book artist named Dick Giordano, but I don't think you'd have known him. He's now editor-in-chief at DC.*

ALVIN: No, I certainly didn't. But I did have a personal friend named **Felice Giordano.** It's not an uncommon name.

RICH: *And Fred Birnley is involved with a woman he always pushes around — and she in turn has another boyfriend named Sidney, whom she pushes around. That reminds me a lot of Superman, Lois Lane and Clark Kent.*

ALVIN: Not at all! Those are sado-masochistic relationships!

RICH: *And you don't think there's any of that between Lois and Clark?*

ALVIN: Certainly not to that extent. Occasionally I could get some sophistication into the SUPERMAN strip, but it wasn't that sort of thing at all.

RICH: *You always seemed to enjoy playing around with identities in the SUPERMAN stories, coming up with new twists on the Superman/Lois/Clark relationship and changing it around.*

ALVIN: That was always the essence of the character.

RICH: *I've told you about John Byrne, who's rewritten the character's origin and changed around a lot of the basic mythos. His Clark wasn't meek and mild-mannered anymore. In fact, he was a football hero. And he sees Clark as the real person and Superman as the assumed identity.*

ALVIN: Talk about major philosophical inversions! Obviously, he doesn't understand the weak/strong polarities that make the character interesting.

RICH: *He's also reduced Superman's powers. He seems to be under the impression that a character who is too powerful is impossible to tell stories about, since there's nothing that can challenge him.*

ALVIN: Of course there is! What if he's faced with someone he can't see, like the Ogies, or someone who doesn't believe in him, like Professor Duste? Or another of my stories, where he lost his memory and had to track down his real identity? *("Superman's Search for Clark Kent," SUPERMAN #32.)*

RICH: *A very good point. All the writers in the old days did things like that — when you have a hero with almost infinite power, you have to come up with situations where brawn alone is no good, so he has to use his brains. I think Byrne's one of those people they had a lot of at Marvel Comics — he liked to have a story that's mostly fight scenes, which won't do when you have a hero who can finish most fights within a page.*

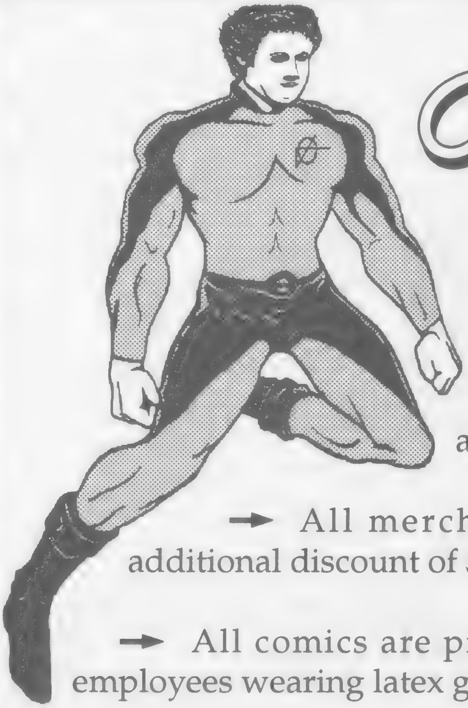
ALVIN: I never worked for Marvel Comics, although they were around in the '50s. **Bill Finger** did some work for them, and thought I might like to try —but I couldn't see working the way they did there, where the writer let the artist draw the story before writing the dialogue.

RICH: *Some of the DC writers work that way now, especially the ones who started at Marvel. But some of them still use the traditional DC style.*

KAY SCHWARTZ: Did anyone ever do a story about what Superman was like as a boy? That would have been an interesting idea.

ALVIN: Sure they did. It was a whole series, don't you remember? SUPERBOY. In Smallville, with Ma and Pa Kent. They're even doing a TV show with him now, which I've seen a few times.

RICH: *Siegel and Shuster had the idea for Superboy back in 1941. The original concept was that he would be Superman*



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"DC characters stayed "nice", respectable, for a long time."

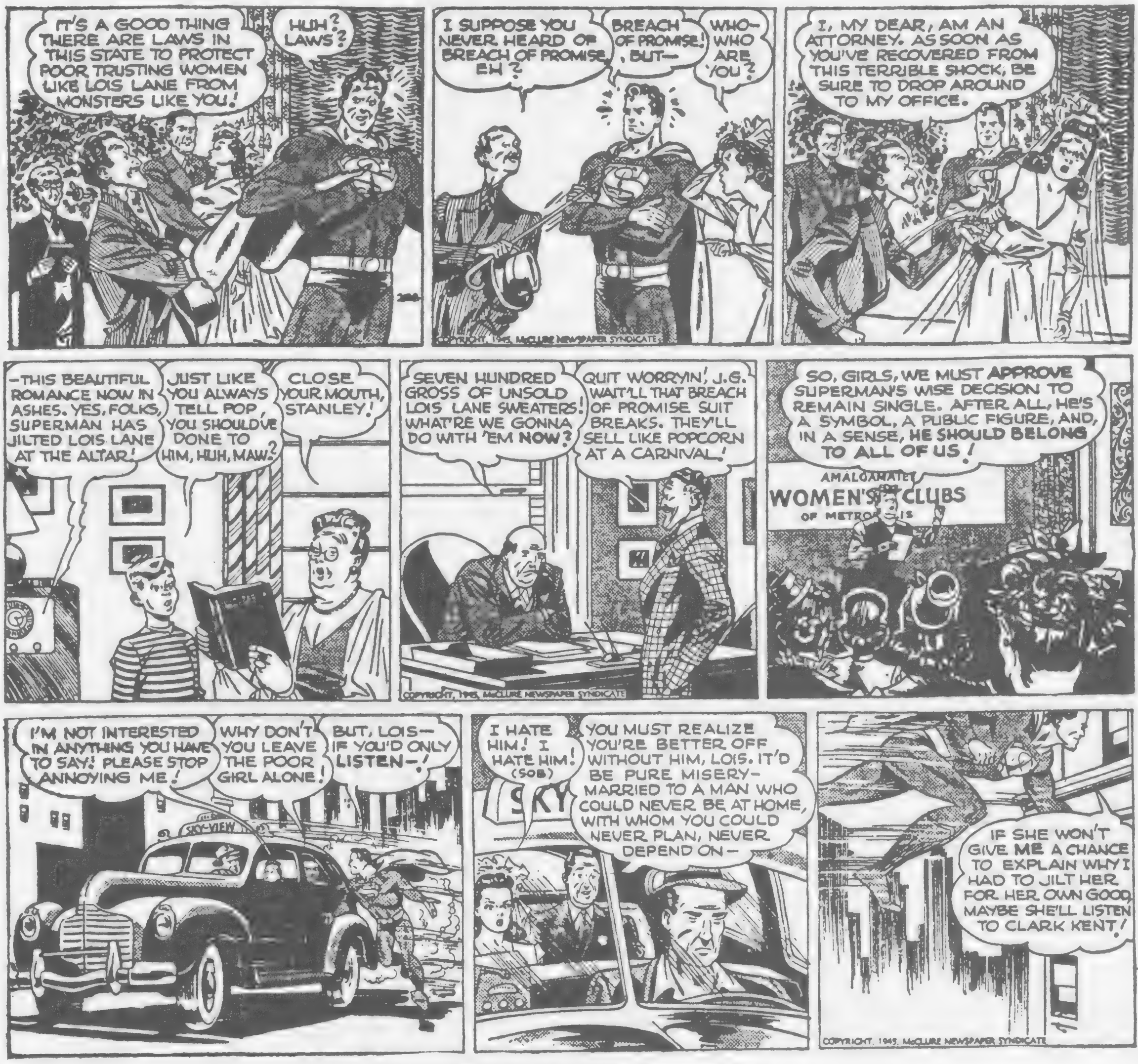
before he had the costume or the social conscience, and used his powers mainly for practical jokes. I guess DC didn't go for that, and had Don Cameron develop him, while Siegel was in the Army, as a more conventional hero wearing the costume. That was one of the sore points with Siegel.

ALVIN: There's an interesting story why DC refused to allow the original concept. The idea parallels the strange little abuses of power performed by the young, immature Jesus in some of the Apocryphal books, and might bear some looking into. The resistance to lack of a social conscience derived directly from the fact that **Donenfeld** got himself into trouble as the publisher of some of those spicy magazines in his empire. In fact, in those early puritanical days, there were obscenity charges laid and **Donenfeld** wanted to avoid that happening again, so DC went out of its way to be clean and sterling. No one was even allowed to use the word "buck" for dollar for fear that a misprint would result in another four-letter word that would once more rouse the sleeping beast of the obscenity legions. That's why all DC characters remained "nice" and respectable for such a long time after trends had developed elsewhere in which cops weren't always the good guys and authority didn't have to be wrapped in red, white and blue, and motherhood, etc. In the end, this further limited the humor potential in both Superman and Batman. Both were always too unyieldingly good, and goodness and humor don't go together. The best way around that was fantasy. I used it, and certainly **Jerry Siegel** used it, and so did Whit and **Don Cameron.**

RICH: *You wrote a lot of the Superboy stories in the '50s, didn't you? I think you did one about a mynah bird* ("The Bird with Super-Powers," ADVENTURE COMICS #225.)

ALVIN: There's a story about that. I knew a chorus girl — she was the sister of a Village sculptress I was dating — who was hooked up with an ancient playboy called **Johnny Hoagland.** Johnny was the Royal Baking Powder heir and the last surviving member of **Diamond Jim Brady's** crowd. **Frank Buck** (BRING 'EM BACK ALIVE), also a friend of Johnny's, had just got a mynah bird from India, and all New York (the glitzy set, I mean) was talking about this bird, and how well he could speak and even sing.

Here and next page: SUPERMAN, the daily comic strip, circa 1945.


IT'S A GOOD THING THERE ARE LAWS IN THIS STATE TO PROTECT POOR TRUSTING WOMEN LIKE LOIS LANE FROM MONSTERS LIKE YOU!
HUH? LAWS?
I SUPPOSE YOU NEVER HEARD OF BREACH OF PROMISE, EH?
BREACH OF PROMISE! BUT—
WHO—WHO ARE YOU?
COPYRIGHT, 1945, McCLURE NEWSPAPER SYNDICATE
I, MY DEAR, AM AN ATTORNEY. AS SOON AS YOU'VE RECOVERED FROM THIS TERRIBLE SHOCK, BE SURE TO DROP AROUND TO MY OFFICE.
—THIS BEAUTIFUL ROMANCE NOW IN ASHES. YES, FOLKS, SUPERMAN HAS JILTED LOIS LANE AT THE ALTAR!
JUST LIKE YOU ALWAYS TELL POP, YOU SHOULD'VE DONE TO HIM, HUH, MAW?
CLOSE YOUR MOUTH, STANLEY!
SEVEN HUNDRED GROSS OF UNSOLD LOIS LANE SWEATERS! WHAT'RE WE GONNA DO WITH 'EM NOW?
QUIT WORRYIN', J.G. WAIT'LL THAT BREACH OF PROMISE SUIT BREAKS. THEY'LL SELL LIKE POPCORN AT A CARNIVAL!
COPYRIGHT, 1945, McCLURE NEWSPAPER SYNDICATE
SO, GIRLS, WE MUST APPROVE SUPERMAN'S WISE DECISION TO REMAIN SINGLE. AFTER ALL, HE'S A SYMBOL, A PUBLIC FIGURE, AND, IN A SENSE, HE SHOULD BELONG TO ALL OF US!
AMALGAMATED WOMEN'S CLUBS OF METROPOLIS
I'M NOT INTERESTED IN ANYTHING YOU HAVE TO SAY! PLEASE STOP ANNOYING ME!
WHY DON'T YOU LEAVE THE POOR GIRL ALONE!
BUT, LOIS— IF YOU'D ONLY LISTEN—!
SKY-VIEW
I HATE HIM! I HATE HIM! (SOB)
YOU MUST REALIZE YOU'RE BETTER OFF WITHOUT HIM, LOIS. IT'D BE PURE MISERY— MARRIED TO A MAN WHO COULD NEVER BE AT HOME, WITH WHOM YOU COULD NEVER PLAN, NEVER DEPEND ON—
SKY
IF SHE WON'T GIVE ME A CHANCE TO EXPLAIN WHY I HAD TO JILT HER FOR HER OWN GOOD, MAYBE SHE'LL LISTEN TO CLARK KENT!
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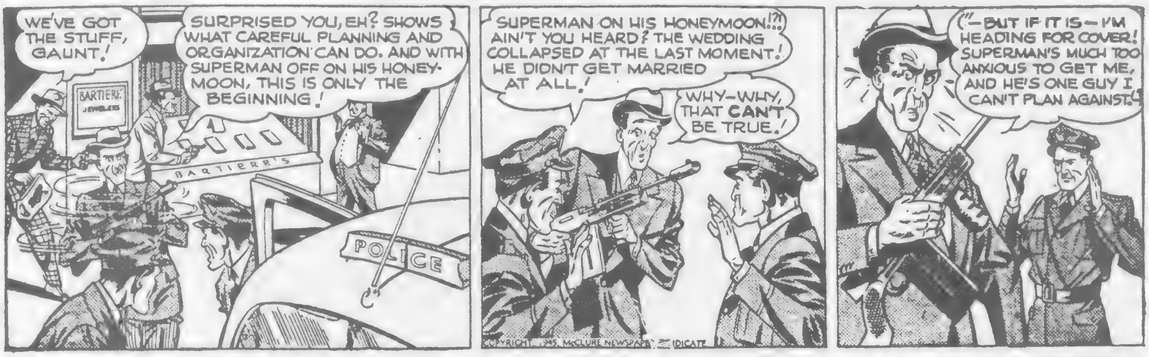
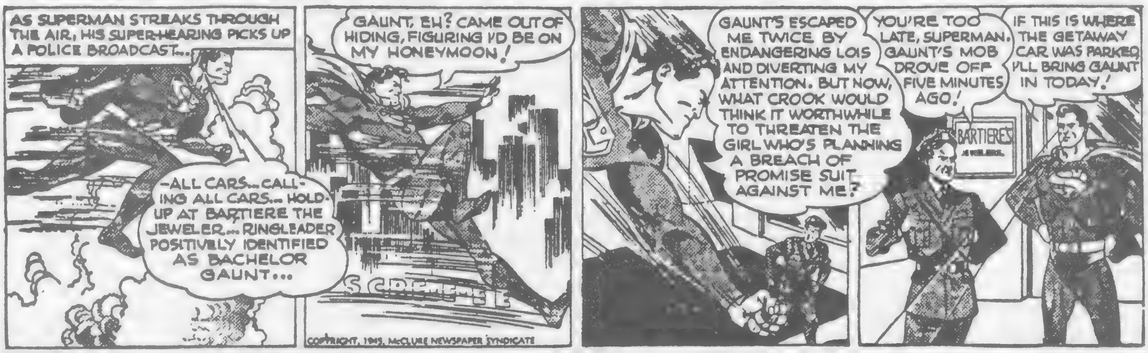
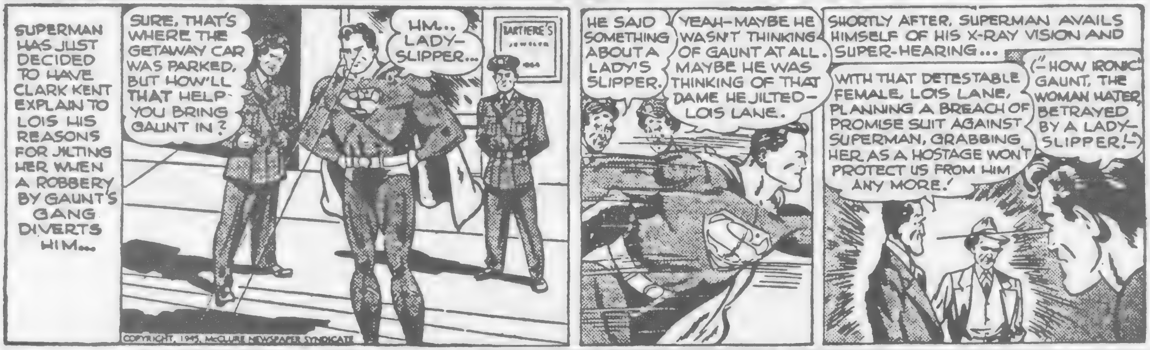
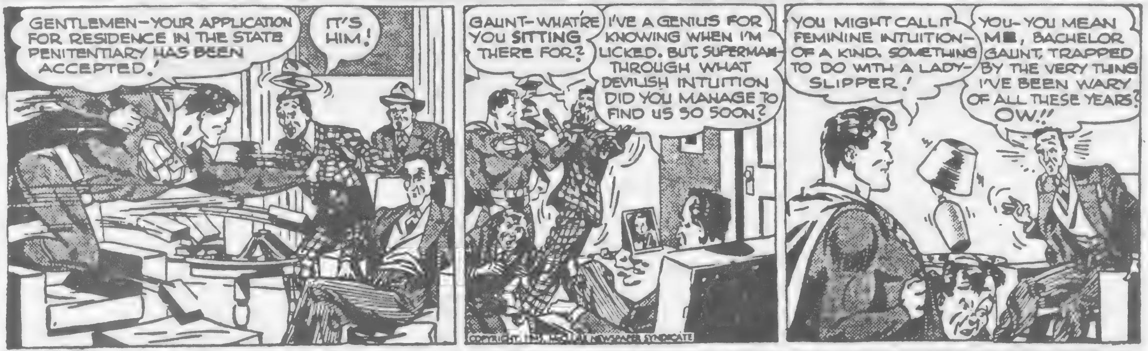
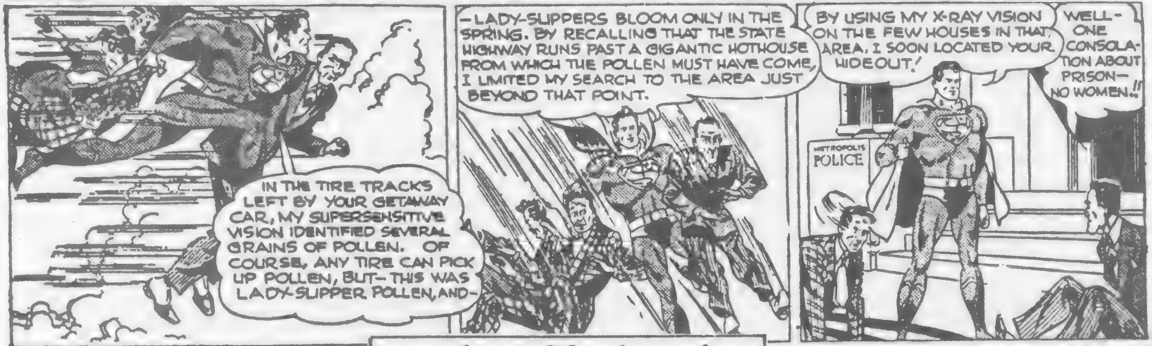

WE'VE GOT THE STUFF, GAUNT!
SURPRISED YOU, EH? SHOWS WHAT CAREFUL PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION CAN DO. AND WITH SUPERMAN OFF ON HIS HONEYMOON, THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING!
BARTIERE JEWELERS
BARTIERRE'S
POLICE
SUPERMAN ON HIS HONEYMOON!?! AIN'T YOU HEARD? THE WEDDING COLLAPSED AT THE LAST MOMENT! HE DIDN'T GET MARRIED AT ALL!
WHY—WHY, THAT CAN'T BE TRUE!
COPYRIGHT, 1945, McCLURE NEWSPAPER SYNDICATE
("—BUT IF IT IS—I'M HEADING FOR COVER! SUPERMAN'S MUCH TOO ANXIOUS TO GET ME, AND HE'S ONE GUY I CAN'T PLAN AGAINST.")

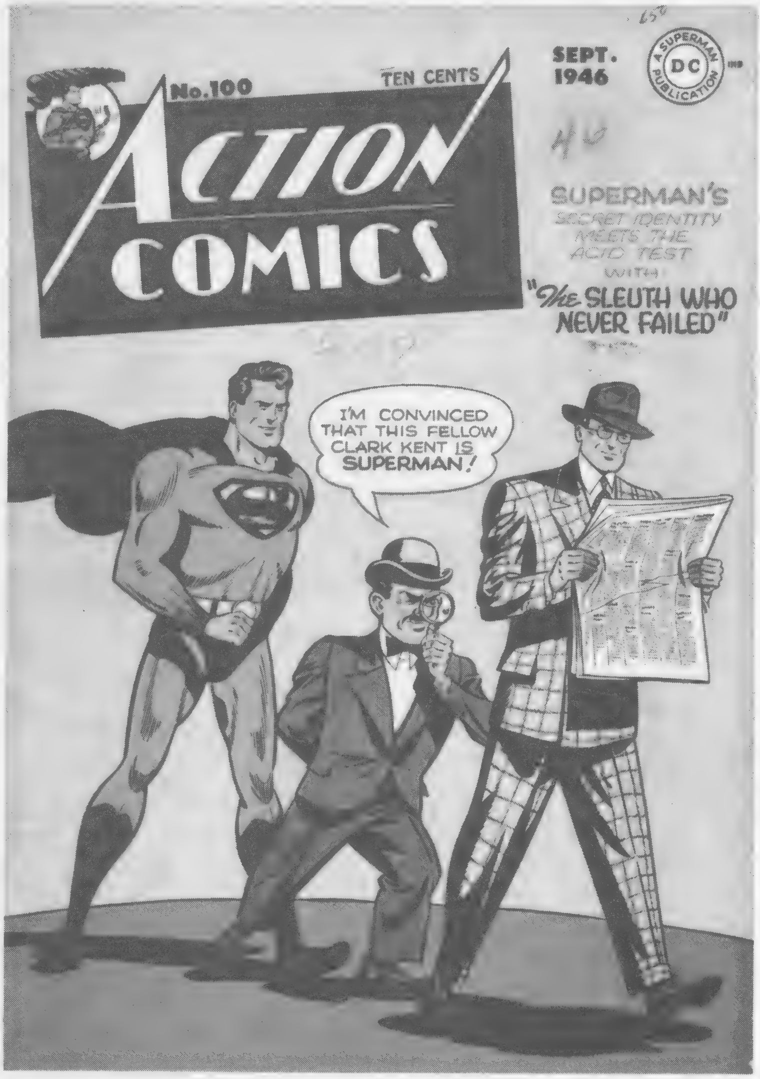

AS SUPERMAN STREAKS THROUGH THE AIR, HIS SUPER-HEARING PICKS UP A POLICE BROADCAST...
—ALL CARS... CALLING ALL CARS... HOLD-UP AT BARTIERE THE JEWELER... RINGLEADER POSITIVELY IDENTIFIED AS BACHELOR GAUNT...
GAUNT, EH? CAME OUT OF HIDING, FIGURING I'D BE ON MY HONEYMOON!
COPYRIGHT, 1945, McCLURE NEWSPAPER SYNDICATE
GAUNT'S ESCAPED ME TWICE BY ENDANGERING LOIS AND DIVERTING MY ATTENTION. BUT NOW, WHAT CROOK WOULD THINK IT WORTHWHILE TO THREATEN THE GIRL WHO'S PLANNING A BREACH OF PROMISE SUIT AGAINST ME?
YOU'RE TOO LATE, SUPERMAN. GAUNT'S MOB DROVE OFF FIVE MINUTES AGO!
IF THIS IS WHERE THE GETAWAY CAR WAS PARKED, I'LL BRING GAUNT IN TODAY!
BARTIERE'S JEWELERS


SUPERMAN HAS JUST DECIDED TO HAVE CLARK KENT EXPLAIN TO LOIS HIS REASONS FOR JILTING HER WHEN A ROBBERY BY GAUNT'S GANG DIVERTS HIM...
SURE, THAT'S WHERE THE GETAWAY CAR WAS PARKED, BUT HOW'LL THAT HELP YOU BRING GAUNT IN?
HM... LADY-SLIPPER...
BARTIERE'S JEWELERS
COPYRIGHT, 1945, McCLURE NEWSPAPER SYNDICATE
HE SAID SOMETHING ABOUT A LADY'S SLIPPER.
YEAH—MAYBE HE WASN'T THINKING OF GAUNT AT ALL. MAYBE HE WAS THINKING OF THAT DAME HE JILTED—LOIS LANE.
SHORTLY AFTER, SUPERMAN AVAILS HIMSELF OF HIS X-RAY VISION AND SUPER-HEARING...
WITH THAT DETESTABLE FEMALE, LOIS LANE, PLANNING A BREACH OF PROMISE SUIT AGAINST SUPERMAN, GRABBING HER AS A HOSTAGE WON'T PROTECT US FROM HIM ANY MORE.
("—HOW IRONIC! GAUNT, THE WOMAN HATER, BETRAYED BY A LADY-SLIPPER!—")


GENTLEMEN—YOUR APPLICATION FOR RESIDENCE IN THE STATE PENITENTIARY HAS BEEN ACCEPTED!
IT'S HIM!
GAUNT—WHAT'RE YOU SITTING THERE FOR?
I'VE A GENIUS FOR KNOWING WHEN I'M LICKED. BUT, SUPERMAN—THROUGH WHAT DEVILISH INTUITION DID YOU MANAGE TO FIND US SO SOON?
COPYRIGHT, 1945, McCLURE NEWSPAPER SYNDICATE
YOU MIGHT CALL IT FEMININE INTUITION—OF A KIND. SOMETHING TO DO WITH A LADY-SLIPPER!
YOU—YOU MEAN ME, BACHELOR GAUNT, TRAPPED BY THE VERY THING I'VE BEEN WARY OF ALL THESE YEARS? OW!!


IN THE TIRE TRACKS LEFT BY YOUR GETAWAY CAR, MY SUPERSENSITIVE VISION IDENTIFIED SEVERAL GRAINS OF POLLEN. OF COURSE, ANY TIRE CAN PICK UP POLLEN, BUT—THIS WAS LADY-SLIPPER POLLEN, AND—
—LADY-SLIPPERS BLOOM ONLY IN THE SPRING. BY RECALLING THAT THE STATE HIGHWAY RUNS PAST A GIGANTIC HOTHOUSE FROM WHICH THE POLLEN MUST HAVE COME, I LIMITED MY SEARCH TO THE AREA JUST BEYOND THAT POINT.
BY USING MY X-RAY VISION ON THE FEW HOUSES IN THAT AREA, I SOON LOCATED YOUR HIDEOUT!
WELL—ONE CONSOLATION ABOUT PRISON—NO WOMEN!!
METROPOLIS POLICE

"I never liked kryptonite and avoided it when I could."


65¢
No.100
TEN CENTS
SEPT. 1946
A SUPERMAN PUBLICATION
DC
ACTION COMICS
4
SUPERMAN'S SECRET IDENTITY MEETS THE ACID TEST WITH "The SLEUTH WHO NEVER FAILED"
I'M CONVINCED THAT THIS FELLOW CLARK KENT IS SUPERMAN!

Johnny — he looked just like a **Peter Arno** cartoon, a roly-poly guy with a moustache — desperately wanted a mynah bird of his own. So I was able to find one from my girlfriend's sister, and we tried to teach him to talk — but we couldn't. He just wouldn't talk, so he was worthless — but I think she ended up selling him to **Hoagland** anyway.

RICH: *Well, this bird could talk. He could even reason for a time, and had super powers — but only temporarily, as the side effect of being exposed to kryptonite.*

ALVIN: I never really liked kryptonite, and didn't use it when I could avoid it. It seemed like too much of a plot contrivance.

RICH: *But you did one of the earliest stories with kryptonite! Bill Finger did the first one in the comic book* ("Superman Returns to Krypton," SUPERMAN #61)*, but that ended up with nobody knowing about it except Superman himself. Yours was a two-parter* ("Luthor's Secret Weapon" and "The Conquest of Superman," ACTION COMICS #141 and 142) *which was the first in which the world learned about kryptonite — and also the first in which it was colored green. Luthor kidnapped Lois Lane and told Superman he'd only let her go if Superman gathered certain materials for him. So Superman had to do it, and Luthor used the materials to make synthetic kryptonite. Later, John Byrne claimed the idea was based on a radio episode.*

ALVIN: I wouldn't know. I never followed SUPERMAN on the radio or on TV. But I was offered the radio show once, and often wished later I'd accepted.

RICH: *How did that come about?*

ALVIN: Through some children's records DC had licensed in the late '40s. They were to be Superman operas — songs, lyrics, librettos, the works. **Alan Ducovny,** the account exec at **Kenyon & Eckhart** who was handling the SUPERMAN radio show, offered them to me after **Ben Friedman,** who was writing the show at the time, discovered he couldn't write lyrics. They appeared in two sets and were a sellout. After that, Duke asked me to take over the radio show, since Ben wanted a rest. I turned it down, because I was busy doing the dailies at DC. I regretted my decision later, because it would have gotten me into Hollywood and out of comics. Duke later had a high executive position at one of the studios.

In any case, Mort was giving all the writers plots by then, and he was always one of the world's great plagiarists. I wouldn't be at all surprised if he got some of them from the radio or TV show.

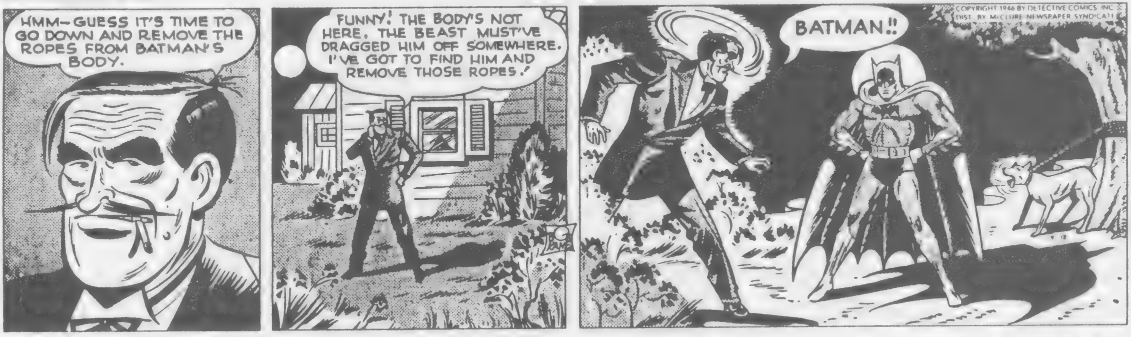
RICH: *It was around that time when he started redoing a lot of the stories in the comic books, too. He'd take a story from five to 20 years ago, and have it rewritten. I think "Superman's Search for Clark Kent" was one such — it was redone as "Superman's Hunt for Clark Kent" in 1959* (SUPERMAN #126)*, in which Superman took a new secret identity as Clarence Kelvin. Did you write that version, too?*

ALVIN: You don't understand **Weisinger's** motivations yet? When he had someone redo "Superman's Search for Clark Kent," he'd never have given the new version to me, the original author. After all, I'd know it wasn't his idea. But when he gives it to someone else — he gets the credit for the idea. Here's how it would go. This new writer comes in with some ideas. Mort doesn't like any of them, and even if he does, he won't tell the guy. After all, some other time, he's going to hand still another writer one or more of those same ideas as if they'd originated with him, Mort. In the meantime, he tells this new writer, "Don't worry, I've got a great idea for you. How about this? Superman loses his memory and has to go look for Clark Kent. Great, right? Don't go 'way. I've got more. I'm hot today . . ." and Mort proceeds to give him the rest of the story. So, of course, I didn't write the Clarence Kelvin version.

RICH: *You were still writing some stories for other editors in the '50s, though. Didn't you do some Batman stories for Jack Schiff, and a few isolated*

“I wouldn’t have felt comfortable with Superman, Batman

BATMAN AND ROBIN Unharmed September 18, 1946 • Wednesday


HMM–GUESS IT'S TIME TO GO DOWN AND REMOVE THE ROPES FROM BATMAN'S BODY.
FUNNY! THE BODY'S NOT HERE. THE BEAST MUST'VE DRAGGED HIM OFF SOMEWHERE. I'VE GOT TO FIND HIM AND REMOVE THOSE ROPES!
BATMAN!!
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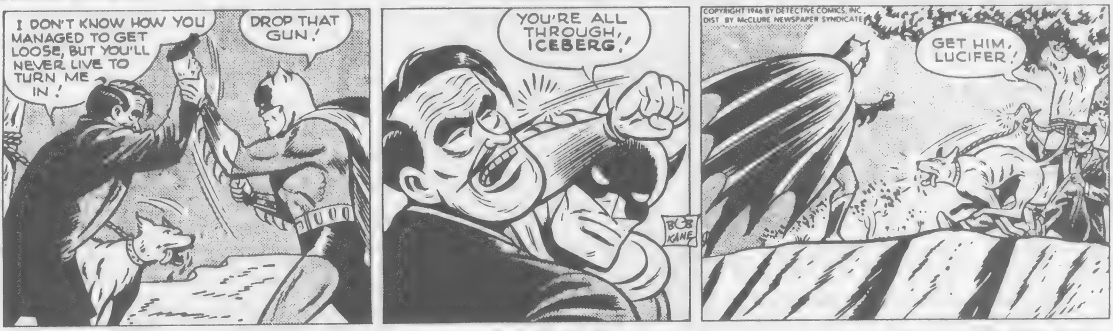
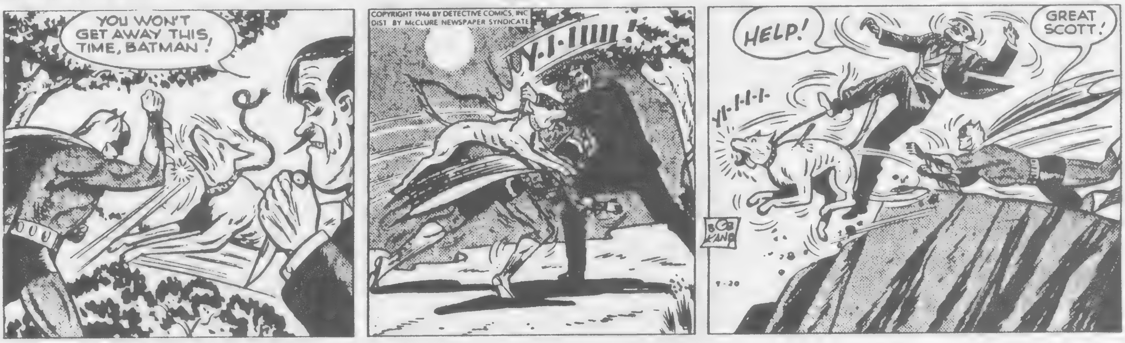
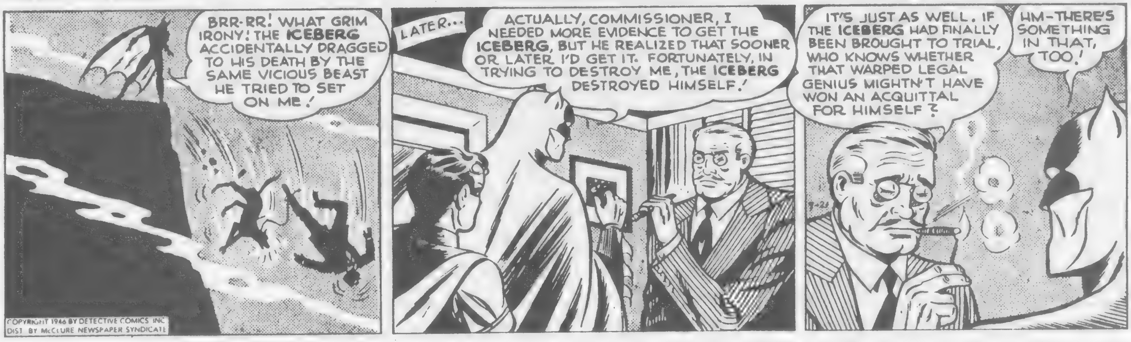
BATMAN AND ROBIN Almost Captured September 19, 1946 • Thursday


I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU MANAGED TO GET LOOSE, BUT YOU'LL NEVER LIVE TO TURN ME IN!
DROP THAT GUN!
YOU'RE ALL THROUGH, ICEBERG!
BOB KANE
COPYRIGHT 1946 BY DETECTIVE COMICS, INC. DIST. BY McCLURE NEWSPAPER SYNDICATE
GET HIM, LUCIFER!

BATMAN AND ROBIN Dragged To His Death September 20, 1946 • Friday


YOU WON'T GET AWAY THIS TIME, BATMAN!
COPYRIGHT 1946 BY DETECTIVE COMICS, INC. DIST. BY McCLURE NEWSPAPER SYNDICATE
Y-I-IIIII!
HELP!
GREAT SCOTT!
YI-I-I-I-
BOB KANE

BATMAN AND ROBIN Self-Destruction September 21, 1946 • Saturday


BRR-RR! WHAT GRIM IRONY! THE ICEBERG ACCIDENTALLY DRAGGED TO HIS DEATH BY THE SAME VICIOUS BEAST HE TRIED TO SET ON ME!
COPYRIGHT 1946 BY DETECTIVE COMICS, INC. DIST. BY McCLURE NEWSPAPER SYNDICATE
LATER...
ACTUALLY, COMMISSIONER, I NEEDED MORE EVIDENCE TO GET THE ICEBERG, BUT HE REALIZED THAT SOONER OR LATER I'D GET IT. FORTUNATELY, IN TRYING TO DESTROY ME, THE ICEBERG DESTROYED HIMSELF!
IT'S JUST AS WELL. IF THE ICEBERG HAD FINALLY BEEN BROUGHT TO TRIAL, WHO KNOWS WHETHER THAT WARPED LEGAL GENIUS MIGHTN'T HAVE WON AN ACQUITTAL FOR HIMSELF?
HM–THERE'S SOMETHING IN THAT, TOO!

supernatural-type stories like “The Sorceror’s Handcuffs?” (Shows him a copy of the story from HOUSE OF SECRETS #1, with art by Mort Drucker.) *The one about the magic handcuffs that can’t be unlocked until those confined by them repent their evil?*

ALVIN: Yes, that’s the one.

RICH: *There’s one thing I’ve always wondered about, though. It ends up with the hobo getting the cuffs and fastening himself to a millionnaire, so he’ll spend the rest of his life in luxury? Only it turns out the millionnaire is just another hobo who won a contest and was only in luxury for that day? But in the last panel he’s also dressed in rags. How could he have changed his shirt and jacket if he’s unbreakably cuffed to the hobo?*

ALVIN: All I can say is that, if it had been me, I’d have fired the editor. Me, I

and Robin together. They represented antithetical unities."

just wrote the stuff.

RICH: *And you also launched the Superman/Batman team-up series in WORLD'S FINEST COMICS* ("Batman — Double for Superman," WORLD'S FINEST #71) *That was also the editor's idea, wasn't it?*

ALVIN: It must have been. To me it was like mixing ice cream and mustard.

RICH: *Jack Schiff was very proud of the idea, though. It seems WORLD'S FINEST wasn't feasible anymore in its 64-page format in 1954, and it had to be cut down to 32 pages, with about 24 pages of stories. So he didn't have room for a 12-page Superman story, a 12-page Batman story, and any of the other characters he used to include. He finally came up with the idea of keeping Green Arrow and Tomahawk as 6-pagers, and leading off with a 12-page story featuring both Superman and Batman. But you didn't stay on it very long — Edmond Hamilton, who'd done the first story to team up the heroes* ("The Mightiest Team in the World," SUPERMAN #76), *came on as a regular writer. You didn't regret that?*

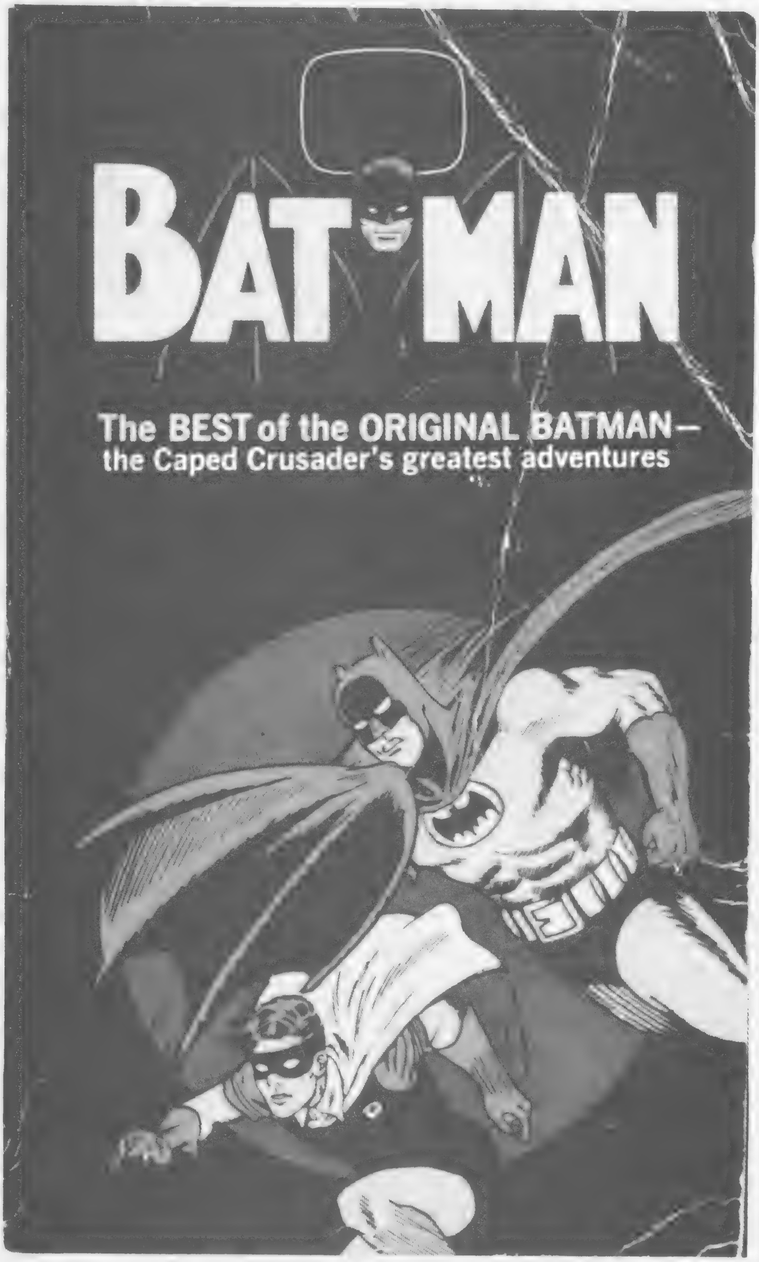
ALVIN: No, I wouldn't have felt comfortable having Superman, Batman and Robin together. They represented such antithetical unities. That it was a solution for **Schiff** of a difficult editorial problem, doesn't change the immiscibility of the characters.

RICH: *Quite a few current writers, including John Byrne, seem to agree with you, though they generally take the rather pointless tack of bringing them together anyway. But it sold very well for many years. They kept it up as the lead feature in WORLD'S FINEST right through 1986.*

ALVIN: In those days, I suppose they were glad to find anything that sold reasonably well. Sales were down all across the board, in general, and even the best of the editors, like **Jack Schiff**, were sometimes hard to work with. By then, it was really a children's market — we'd had a lot of adult readers during the war, especially the soldiers, but they had mostly drifted away afterwards. Of course Mort was more impossible than ever, but he insisted that I work mostly for him. And I was doing a lot of the shorter stuff by then — JIMMY OLSEN and LOIS LANE, after that started up as a comic book.

RICH: *I still liked a lot of what you were doing then. A couple of your Jimmy Olsen stories* ("The Jimmy Olsen from Jupiter," JIMMY OLSEN #32, and "The Lady-Killer from Metropolis," JIMMY OLSEN #33) *were reprinted in the mid-'60s, and I thought they were especially well-done and funny long before I learned who wrote them. DC editor Mike Gold said he thought the first story was one of the greatest Olsen stories ever, and included it in DC's collection THE GREATEST 1950S STORIES EVER TOLD. Of course, he did miscredit it to Otto Binder.*

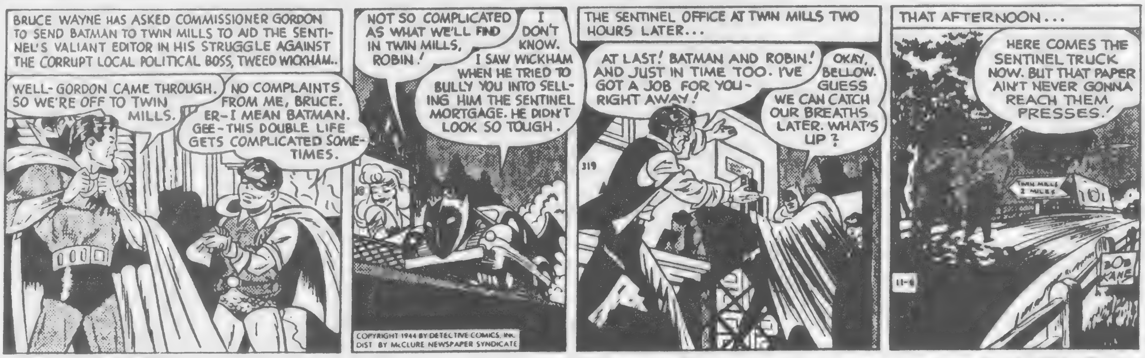
ALVIN: Well, that was when things were getting really hard, and I was getting ready to quit. In fact, I did quit several times, only to come back when things got worse in the '50s recession. Mort was demanding so many rewrites for each story, that it was simply impossible to make a living any longer. And **Whit Ellsworth's** departure clinched it. Later in the '50s and before he actually retired, Whit took off and spent most of his time in Hollywood and was rarely seen in the


BATMAN
The BEST of the ORIGINAL BATMAN—
the Caped Crusader's greatest adventures

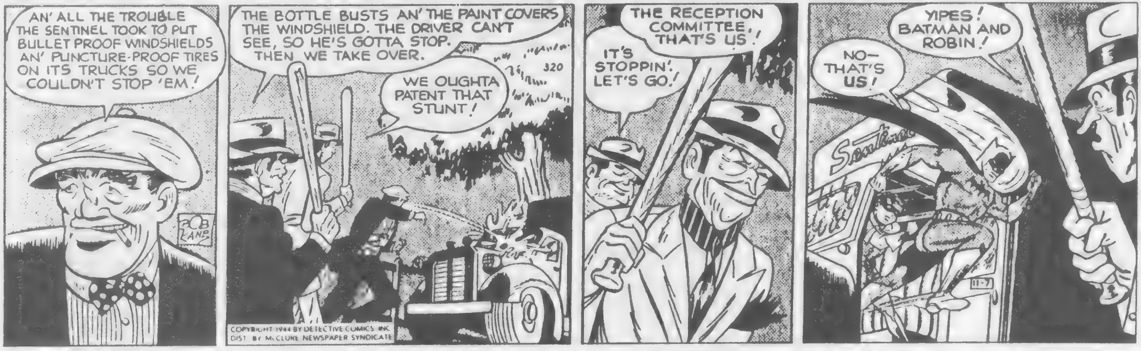
Cover of a 1966 Signet Pocket Book collection, containing, among others, Alvin's "The Crazy Crime Clown" (the splash of which can be found at the beginning of this interview).

"I like the fact that some publishers let you own characters."

BATMAN AND ROBIN No Time To Breathe November 6, 1944 • Monday


BRUCE WAYNE HAS ASKED COMMISSIONER GORDON TO SEND BATMAN TO TWIN MILLS TO AID THE SENTINEL'S VALIANT EDITOR IN HIS STRUGGLE AGAINST THE CORRUPT LOCAL POLITICAL BOSS, TWEED WICKHAM..
WELL- GORDON CAME THROUGH. SO WE'RE OFF TO TWIN MILLS.
NO COMPLAINTS FROM ME, BRUCE. ER- I MEAN BATMAN. GEE- THIS DOUBLE LIFE GETS COMPLICATED SOMETIMES.
NOT SO COMPLICATED AS WHAT WE'LL FIND IN TWIN MILLS, ROBIN!
I DON'T KNOW.
I SAW WICKHAM WHEN HE TRIED TO BULLY YOU INTO SELLING HIM THE SENTINEL MORTGAGE. HE DIDN'T LOOK SO TOUGH.
COPYRIGHT 1944 BY DETECTIVE COMICS, INC. DIST. BY McCLURE NEWSPAPER SYNDICATE
THE SENTINEL OFFICE AT TWIN MILLS TWO HOURS LATER...
AT LAST! BATMAN AND ROBIN! AND JUST IN TIME TOO. I'VE GOT A JOB FOR YOU- RIGHT AWAY!
OKAY, BELLOW. GUESS WE CAN CATCH OUR BREATHS LATER. WHAT'S UP?
319
THAT AFTERNOON...
HERE COMES THE SENTINEL TRUCK NOW. BUT THAT PAPER AIN'T NEVER GONNA REACH THEM PRESSES!
TWIN MILLS 2 MILES
11-6
BOB KANE

BATMAN AND ROBIN Hot Cargo November 7, 1944 • Tuesday


AN' ALL THE TROUBLE THE SENTINEL TOOK TO PUT BULLET PROOF WINDSHIELDS AN' PUNCTURE-PROOF TIRES ON ITS TRUCKS SO WE COULDN'T STOP 'EM!
BOB KANE
THE BOTTLE BUSTS AN' THE PAINT COVERS THE WINDSHIELD. THE DRIVER CAN'T SEE, SO HE'S GOTTA STOP. THEN WE TAKE OVER.
WE OUGHTA PATENT THAT STUNT!
320
COPYRIGHT 1944 BY DETECTIVE COMICS, INC. DIST. BY McCLURE NEWSPAPER SYNDICATE
THE RECEPTION COMMITTEE, THAT'S US!
IT'S STOPPIN'. LET'S GO!
YIPES! BATMAN AND ROBIN!
NO- THAT'S US!
11-7

office. He got himself involved with Columbia Pictures, who were doing the SUPERMAN TV show. And that was when Mort really started to run wild.

RICH: *You've said "The Superwoman of Metropolis"* (LOIS LANE #8) *was your last story? There seemed to be a lot of trouble with that story — it was announced a couple of times as slated for a SUPERMAN issue, but it ended up in LOIS LANE instead. That's the one where Superman gives Lois temporary super powers as a birthday present, and also to give her a chance to be on the receiving end of Clark Kent's identity search for a change.*

ALVIN: I hated it, now that I recall it. It was one of Mort's really silly premises that I was forced to do, and the straw that led me to quit for good. If Superman could transfer his powers to anyone else, even temporarily, he could have and, in many cases, should have done it with others. Think how it degrades the nature of the character and the quality of the stories.

RICH: *So you went into marketing research then?*

ALVIN: Yes, and made far, far more than I ever made at DC, with that and with direct-mail packages. Then I took my wife and children and moved up to Canada, where I worked on documentary dramas for the National Film Board of Canada, was a consultant to the **Trudeau** government, did a couple of feature films for other producers. I also ran an ad agency in Montreal. Now that I have enough to live on, I'm getting back into writing novels. I've just begun to realize how archetypal the ideas from the comics are, in terms of individuals with great power. THE BELWETHERS, one of a trilogy of novels recently completed, is about an Irish priest who gradually discovers an inner power consistent with a messianic calling. His struggle against his own desires and his efforts to end the Cold War effectively tie in with the "miracle" that senior U.S. statesman **George Kennan** recognizes in the coming of **Gorbachev** and the collapse of the Soviet Union. THE PERFORMERS, latest in the series, is about a man who actually adopts a secret identity as an international financier, and prefigures such events as the BCCI scandal and the financial machinations of the late **Robert Maxwell.** And THE STRAIGHT TREE, now in progress, is about a young man who finds he has the gift of psychic healing, becoming a second **Edgar Cayce** in the process and discovering the agonies of possessing that awesome gift while struggling to maintain a tender and enriching relationship with a woman twice his age.

RICH: *One of the characters in THE STRAIGHT TREE — the academic who establishes the foundation for psychic healing — was called Henry Hornbladder. That's an odd name.*

ALVIN: Well, I've always had a fondness for unusual, outlandish names. I used to come up with them for fun, when it seemed appropriate to the story.

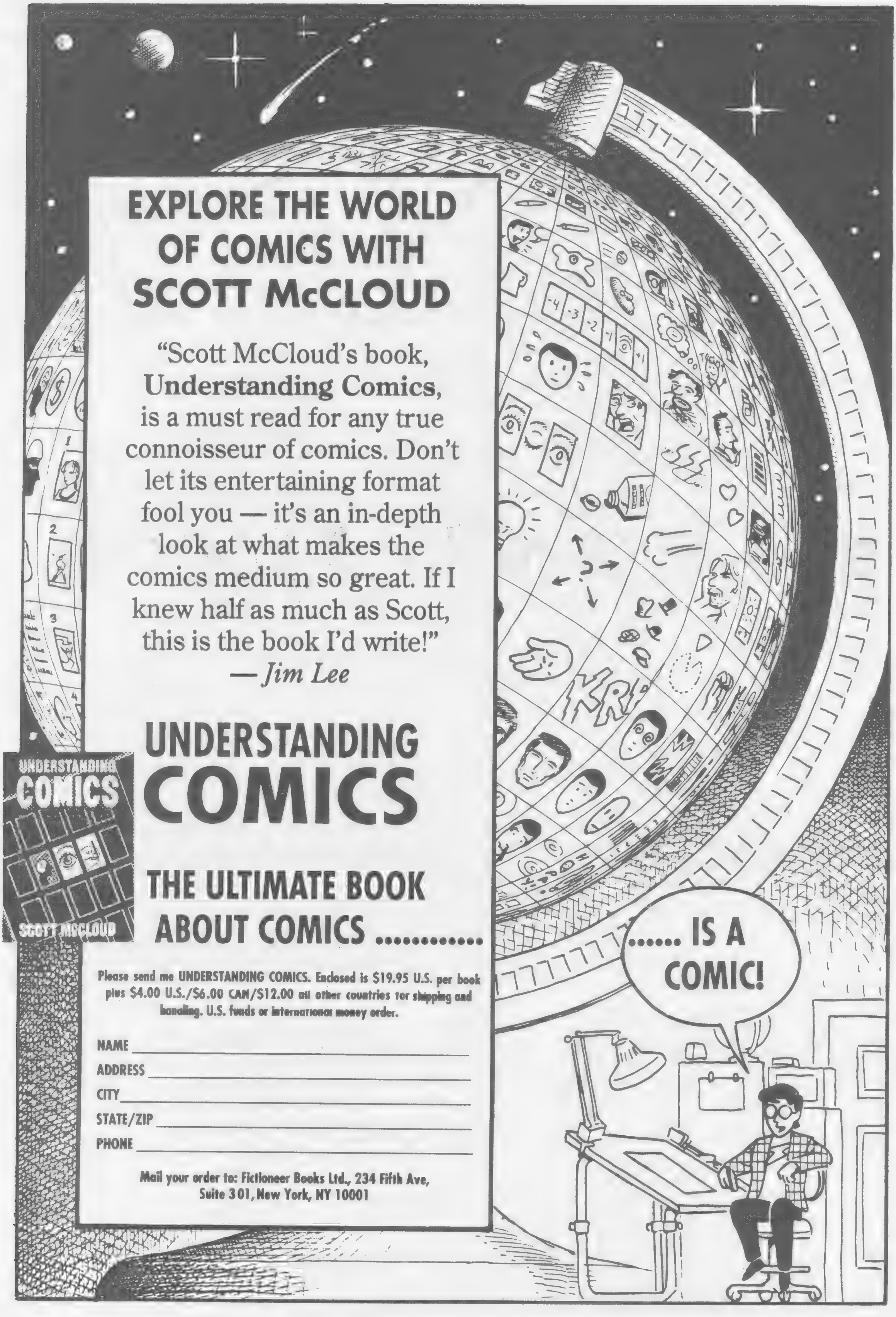
RICH: *Like your BATMAN newspaper sequence that revealed some of the Penguin's background, and established his real name as Oswald Chesterfield Cobblepot.* (Sunday, early 1946) *They're still going along with that name at DC.*

ALVIN: I can't do that with every character, but sometimes it works. Actually, it turns out the family's original German name was Hornblatter, and it had been Anglicized during World War II. Another character, Max Blatt, turns out to be his brother, who'd changed the name a different way.

RICH: *Well, I hope you do well with these novels. Is there any chance you might ever return to comics?*

ALVIN: There's a possibility. I liked what **Joe Lansdale** did with his Batman novel *(CAPTURED BY THE ENGINES, 1991)* and wouldn't mind trying my hand at one. And I like the fact that some of the independent publishers let you create and own your own characters. I just submitted an idea to **Barbara Kesel** at Dark Horse, whom I met at the convention, and I'll see what she thinks of it.

RICH: *Thank you very much for your time.*



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—*Jim Lee*

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"BOURBON STREET BEAT & SURFSIDE SIX were

b&w. The first color show I did was GREEN HORNET.”

VAN WILLIAMS

Picture this: Over 20 years ago you starred in a TV series, a series you didn't even want to be in, on a lark for only one season. You then decide to get out of acting, and become a highly-respected law officer and businessman. Years later the show becomes a huge cult hit, and now fans are asking you to do interviews left and right.

That's pretty much how Van Williams feels. He starred on THE GREEN HORNET for only 26 episodes, but, thanks to a popular comic book being published by Now Comics, he is always getting asked to do convention appearances and autograph signings. THE GREEN HORNET had its original run in the 1965-66 season. It starred an as-yet-unknown martial arts champion named Bruce Lee as the Hornet's sidekick, Kato. Also starring in the show was Lloyd Gogh as Mike Axford, the bumbling yet competent newspaper reporter, Wende Wagner as Britt Reid's secretary Lenore "Casey" Case, and Walter Brooke as District Attorney Frank Scanlon — Casey and Scanlon being the only two in Britt Reid's life who knew of his secret identity. In small cameo appearances, Gary Owens, most remembered as the voice of Space Ghost and the announcer on LAUGH-IN, turned up occasionally as a newscaster, and Barbara Babcock also turned up in a couple of episodes as Britt Reid's escort.

Unlike its sister show, BATMAN, THE GREEN HORNET was played seriously, dealing with such real-life issues as drug running, crime bosses and corrupt police officers. But, like BATMAN, it did have some well-respected guest stars. Lloyd Bochner, Harold Gould and John Carradine all turned up in separate episodes.

THE GREEN HORNET was about a masked vigilante who masqueraded as a crime boss in order to infiltrate other crime organizations. His first adventures were in radio where he was a spin-off of THE LONE RANGER. In fact, the original Hornet was the grand-nephew of the Ranger. The radio show lasted from 1936 to 1952, when radio began to die down.

The TV show was produced by William Dozier and his Greenway Productions, and was a direct result of BATMAN being so popular. ABC wanted to duplicate the success of BATMAN. It is very rarely syndicated, and people today mostly remember him from the two-part crossover he did on BATMAN.

THE GREEN HORNET and all photos accompanying this interview TM & ©1993 The Green Hornet, Inc. / 20th Century Fox TV.

"I was courting Mary Tyler Moore

I'd like to thank Van Williams for taking the time out of his busy schedule for this interview . . .

DAVE GALVAN: *Where are you from originally?*
VAN WILLIAMS: Fort Worth, Texas.
DAVE: *How did you get into acting? Was this something you wanted to do as a kid?*
VAN: No, I fell into it. To make a long story short, in 1956 I ended up going to Hawaii to do some demolition and salvage diving as a SCUBA diver. Ended up working for a guy named **Mike Todd,** who was at the time married to **Elizabeth Taylor.** Through some of his contacts after he died — in 1958 he died in a plane crash — I still knew some of the people and I graduated from Texas Christian University at his recommendation. I came back out here and almost right off the bat went under contract to Revue Studios, went from Revue to Warner Bros. Did two series at Warner Bros. and it just went on from there.
DAVE: *What was your prior acting work? I remember seeing you in an episode of THE DICK VAN DYKE SHOW.*
VAN: That was after I got out of Warner Bros. That was considerably later than when I got into the business. I think the first film work I did was 1958.
DAVE: *That early?*
VAN: Yeah. Then I was under contract from '59 to '65 at Warner Bros. Studios, did two series and all sorts of guest shots on all their different shows, '77 SUNSET STRIP, MAVERICK and LAWMAN. The series I did there was BOURBON STREET BEAT and SURFSIDE SIX. Then I went as an independent with Desilu with **Walter Brennan,** a show called TYCOON . . .
DAVE: *I have an old promo for that . . .*
VAN: . . . I did a bunch of pilots that didn't sell. The next series I did was THE GREEN HORNET, then I did HOW THE WEST WAS WON, then I did WEST WIND, which was a Saturday Morning show done in Hawaii, which was probably the most fun show I ever did and it's too bad it didn't last. That could have gone on for 20 years, it was so easy to do, got it done so quick and I did the things I wanted to do. I was diving, sailing boats and doing all that.
DAVE: *What was that show about?*
VAN: It was about a man and his wife who lived on a 41-foot ketch, had a daughter and a son and we went from island to island getting into all sorts of little adventures, primarily with the kids, then Mom and Dad would back them up. I was a photojournalist and a diver and my wife was a marine biologist and a diver, and we did a lot of diving. It was just beautiful. The show was easy to do. We did a half-hour show every day and a half, which was almost unheard-of, with 16-mm film, and it was absolutely gorgeous and we had a ball. It was fairly professionally done for that low a budget show, and we had a ball on it!
DAVE: *This was about what time, '75?*
VAN: This had to be '75, '76, around there.
DAVE: *I saw Rob Reiner on BOB COSTAS a while ago and he mentioned that he used to hang out on the set of his father's show. Do you remember him at all?*
VAN: Yeah, he was there. He was a little kid. Well, now that I'm saying that I don't know whether I met him on the show that I did. See, **Mary Tyler Moore** was under contract at Warners when I was there. I don't know how I got chosen for the part, but what it was was a flicker flash-back, back to the military days of where I supposedly was her boyfriend in the military. I don't know whether she was in the military, but **Dick Van Dyke** was.
DAVE: *She was with the USO or something like that.*
VAN: I guess that's what it was. Anyway, I was courting her and Rob was courting her and he won out and I lost. It was a funny show. It was just on not too long ago. Somebody saw it up in Idaho and called and said "Hey, that was a funny show!"
DAVE: *I remember seeing that and I ran into the next room screaming "Hey*

and I lost to Rob Reiner. It was funny."

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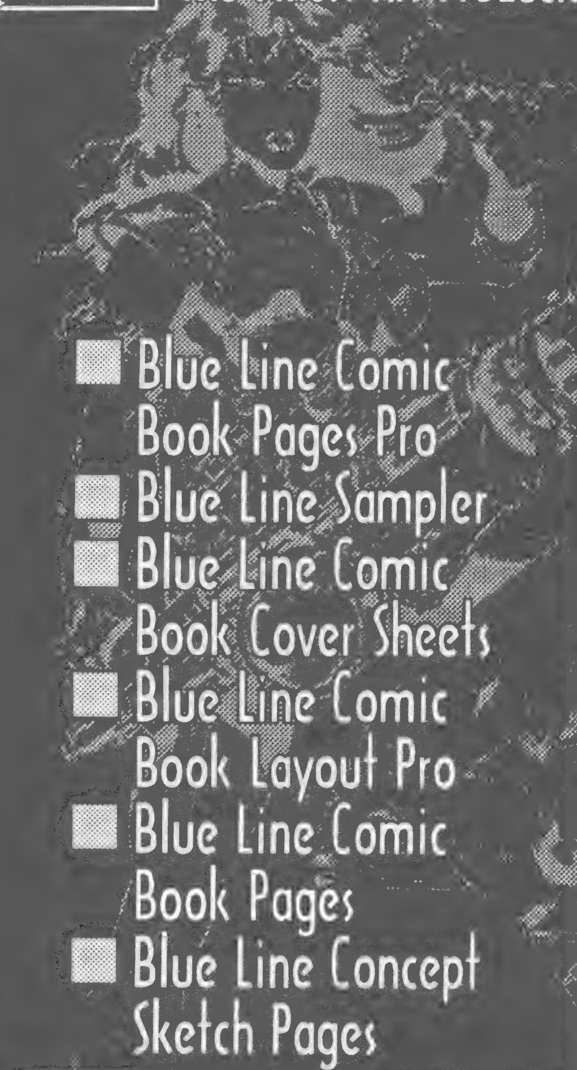

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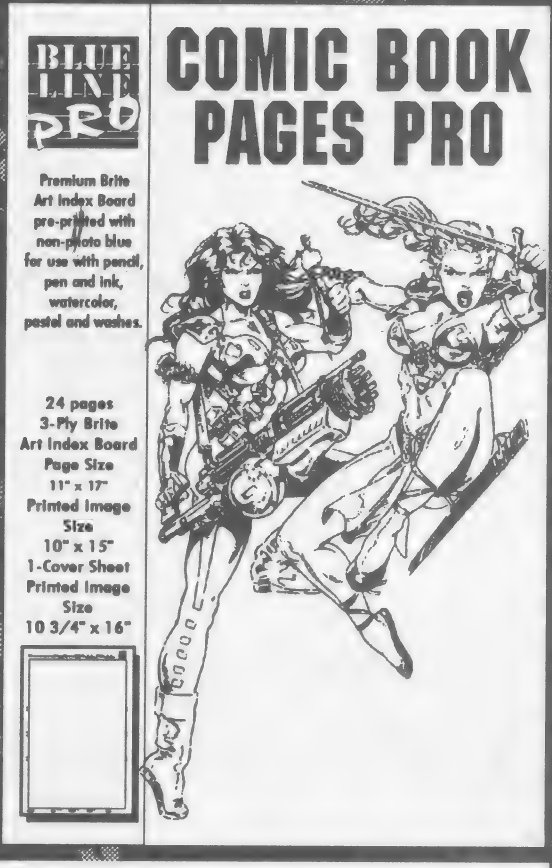

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"THE GREEN HORNET: I said no way."

Mom, the Green Hornet is on THE DICK VAN DYKE SHOW!!" What was this movie you were in that was going to be turned into a TV series, something about a submarine?

VAN: That was a hell of a show. I wish that thing would have gone instead of THE GREEN HORNET. They did it as a $2 million picture. They had **Dame Edith Evans** from England. It was a four-star deal and they spent a bunch of money on it and really did it up right. It was about a submarine commander during World War II in the South Pacific. First it was called THE SEA WOLVES and that conflicted with some kind of a book. So they ended up calling it PURSUE AND DESTROY. It was really excellent. We had the guy that was head of Com-Sub Fleet, the submarine fleet during World War II as our expert. He wrote a huge book about the whole submarine fleet during World War II, especially that Pacific fleet. I think the reason it died was two things: ABC had decided that year not to have one-sponsor shows. They wanted to divide it up to at least two sponsors or four sponsors, so the sponsors didn't have so much power. The show was 100% sold to ALCOA, American Aluminum Company. The next problem was we had to go out and buy a submarine.

DAVE: *Oh!*

VAN: The biggest problem on that was that all the submarines that were available did not have the superstructure that met all of our footage that the Navy had from Pacific operations from the fleet of submarines. They'd all been converted to snorkel, except one in Australia and one in San Diego that had not been converted to snorkel. They were going to have to buy one of those because it was going to be either decommissioned or snorkelized. They had hundreds and thousands of feet of good footage from World War II and a lot of it was in color, which was surprising because color was not coming around that much. I did BOURBON STREET BEAT and SURFSIDE SIX in black and white. The first color show I did was THE GREEN HORNET; of course that was extremely expensive to do color. Now we're looking at '65, you're looking at World War II and they had color film on underwater war operations with fleet submarines.

DAVE: *If they couldn't get a submarine for the TV show, how did they get one for the movie?*

VAN: We used the one in San Diego. It was about to either be mothballed or decommissioned and junked. But it was one that was put down there like a museum. It was a diesel submarine, but it did

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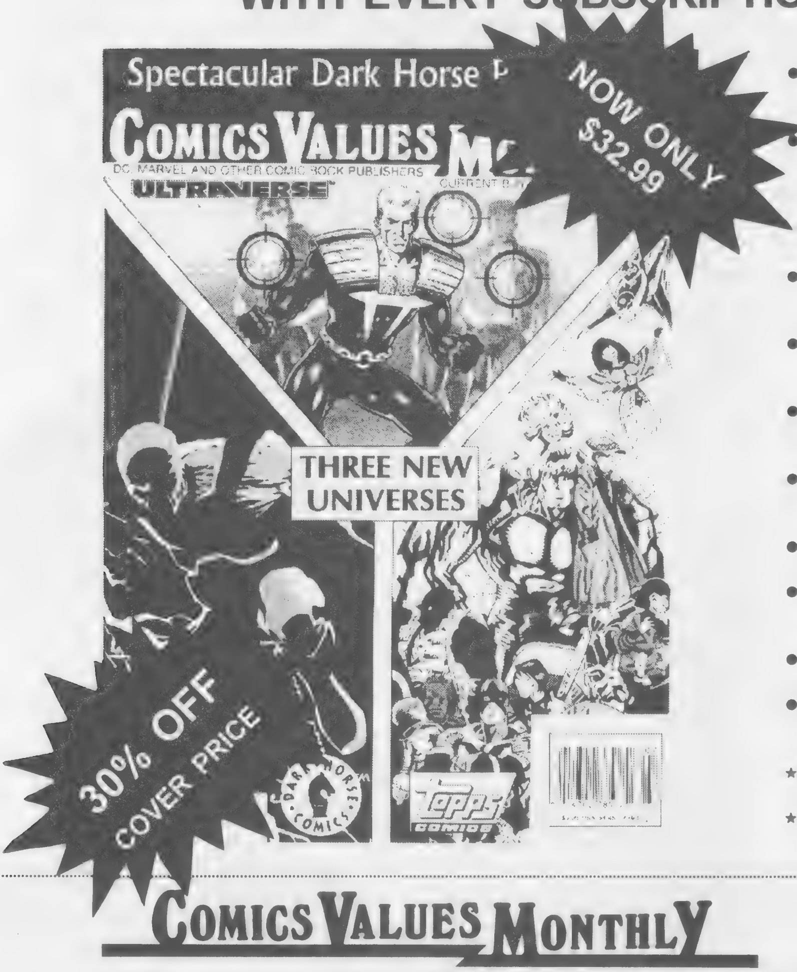
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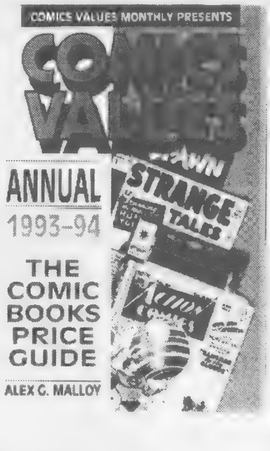
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"BATMAN, everybody got sick of it, and it died."

not have the breathing apparatus, the snorkel. It had to surface to regenerate the batteries to run submerged, and that was going to be decommissioned that year. There was another one in Australia. I don't know what happened to either one of them.

We were on the schedule right up until like June of that year. I couldn't sign anything else because they would not release me because we were on the schedule for ABC. All of a sudden they couldn't get the submarine, they couldn't get this, they couldn't get that. They couldn't get another sponsor besides ALCOA, so they said "We dropped it." As soon as they dropped it, ABC started pushing me toward doing THE GREEN HORNET. I heard one thing about that and I said there's absolutely no way I'm going to do that show.

DAVE: *So how come you did it?*

VAN: In a back doorway what happened with my agency, which at that time was **William Morris**, I said, "I don't want to do this show." They said, "At this point you're starting to really get going; we don't want to offend anybody. What we'll do is we'll ask for three times more than they're offering, and we won't come down and they won't come up and we'll just go about our way."

DAVE: *And they'll just drop you.*

VAN: Yeah. So we did that. They came up with the price! Now I'm stuck, I can't back out because these were the conditions that my side of the contract wanted. So I'm now stuck.

DAVE: *So you got weaseled in, in other words?*

VAN: I got weaseled in. I think **William Morris** actually had an idea that they would go triple what they were offering for that show. My wife almost divorced me over doing it. She did not want me to do that. She said "You're going to be so typecast. If you want to be an actor for the rest of your life, you're through." Just like **Adam West** was through. Adam's been able to do hardly anything except BATMAN and be allied with BATMAN. But his show was a lot more popular than mine, so he's made a lot of money off of it. I never made any money off of THE GREEN HORNET until just lately.

DAVE: *Did you have a screen test?*

VAN: No. There was no pilot; there was no test. To be honest with you, I'm not absolutely certain that **William Dozier**, the producer, really felt like I was the right guy for it. But I think he was pressured into it by ABC. In my one meeting with him I said, "What is this thing you're going to do? Is it going to be another carbon copy of BATMAN, all this WHAM! BAM!" He said, "Oh no, we're going to play it very serious. We're very serious about keeping this thing the original way that it was on the radio show and the old 15-minute Saturday serials . . ."

DAVE: *Yeah, I love those . . .*

VAN: He said, "We promised the guy that owned the show that we're going to do this with it. If anything we're going to do it more like the James Bond type."

My first comment, after I read the first script was, "You got all this stuff you're going to do, there's no way you're going to do it in a half hour!"

DAVE: *Wasn't it originally going to be a one-hour show?*

VAN: Never heard about that. It should have been from the beginning. That would have made the show last for years and I think it would have outlasted BATMAN. BATMAN was so far out that it didn't take long for everybody to get sick of it and it died. THE GREEN HORNET was nothing but a guy, you could maybe picture a guy being a vigilante and putting

One of the more famous publicity pics.

"If it was really hot I'd lose maybe 10 to

on a mask just like the Lone Ranger, because that's where it came from.

DAVE: *Your weapons on the show, The Sting was obviously a piece of plastic that you pointed and some off-camera guy would flip a switch and something would blow up. But what about the gas gun? How did that work?*

VAN: We had major problems with that to get the thing to ever work right. It was supposed to be a gas gun that just knocked people out. The biggest problem was you can't pressurize a particular gas in the low-key lighting that we were using, real dark, with no background, and have it show up. So they used all sorts of different things and never could see the gas. It ended up to where you heard it, but you didn't see it. They wanted to see it. So what eventually happened was, I had a little bottle with high-pressure gas in it. When I pulled the trigger it blew out green talcum powder over this gas jet. It actually engulfed the people and they fell and that's what they wanted. But what a major problem it was to get the thing to work, to get it to key right, but they finally did it. It took 15 minutes or 30 minutes to put that gadget on me to get me to use it. That was nothing but they wanted to sell gadgets and gimmicks to make money off of. They sold a lot of the gas guns; they sold a lot of the Sting guns.

The Sting, as far as I was concerned, was nothing but a thing that looked like a nine-inch tube about an inch and a half around. I carried it in my coat pocket, I took it out, hit a button, it extended and you got this "Wrwrwrwrwrwr" sound, which was nothing but layover sound, then the thing exploded or whatever. The only problem with it was that the spring they had in the thing was too strong. I would take it out, hit the button and it would go "thrang" and a lot of times that thing would break and go right through the wall!

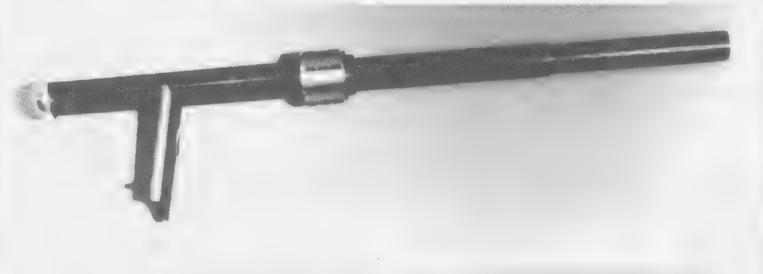
DAVE: (Laughter.)

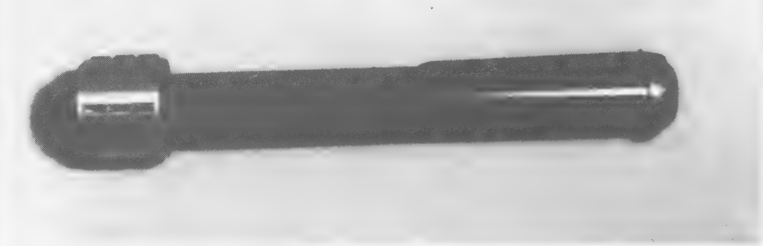
VAN: It was such a strong spring, so it got to the point they took the spring out of it and all I did was just pull it out and point it at something and they laid over the sound effect.

DAVE: *How many masks did you go through?*

VAN: A lot of them. We did all sorts of

The Sting extended. Maybe an early version.





The Sting retracted.

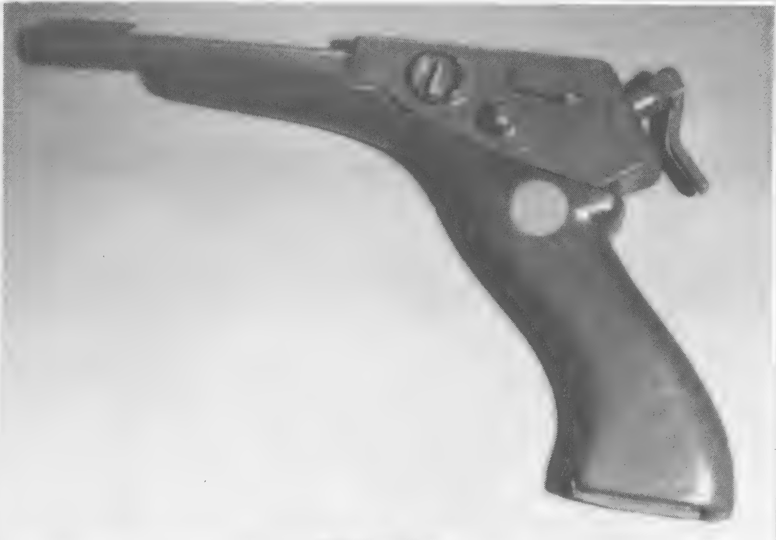
tests. Many of the masks that are out on the pictures that I sign at conventions were test masks. It was not until after the third or fourth show that 20th Century Fox finally decided to mold both Bruce's and my face, and mold a mask to our face that fit like glasses. They fit perfectly that way. Then we could see, we could do anything we wanted to. They fit so good they just clung to your face and you would not have to worry about them falling off and not being able to see to do the stunts or whatever. But we went through a lot of them. Look at some of those old pictures. I've got a five-o'clock shadow. Those were test things, and they didn't work. We hated those things, but somehow or another they got out and I would say 75% of the pictures that were out were all test things for the masks.

DAVE: *Your costume sure looked hot.*

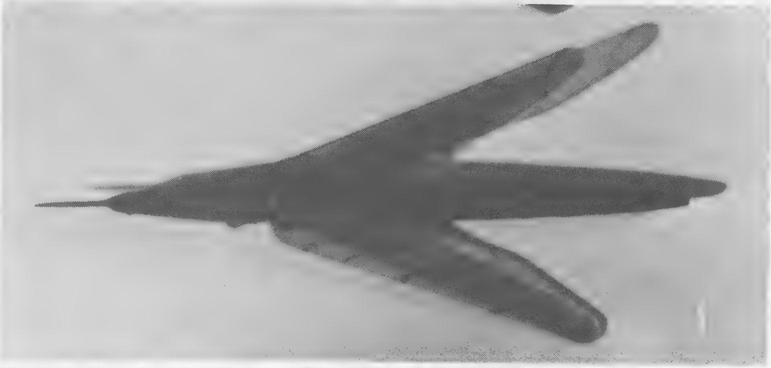
VAN: It was. Oh God! If it was really hot one day I'd lose maybe ten to fifteen pounds per day.

DAVE: *What did the complete costume consist of?*

VAN: I had a regular suit, with a tie. Then a scarf, an overcoat, the mask and the hat. The biggest problem was we'd be out in the middle of nowhere, maybe it was 110 degrees, I've got all of this stuff on and I'd just sweat. What I'd tried first doing was taking the suit coat off, but the overcoat didn't hang right. Then we tried to do it without the scarf. That didn't look right. All the scarf did was to seal all my sweating and ventilation. It was a major problem. That was one of my biggest complaints about the whole deal. Every shot that I was in when I was doing THE GREEN HORNET it was either get dressed, or get undressed, go do it, put it all on, leave it on, get the thing done and over with and get out of it and go on back to Britt Reid where you didn't have to wear it.



The Gas Gun.



One of Kato's darts.

DAVE: *So all your location shots were shot during the day?*

VAN: Not always, no. We did an awful lot of location shots off the lot that were done real early in the morning before daylight and in the evening.

Car model used in "flipping" footage.

DAVE: *A lot of the footage looks like it was shot during the day then darkened to look like it was night.*

VAN: Day for night they call it. There was a lot of that stuff done, but most of that stuff was done on the 20th Century Fox lot where we were going through a town. If we were going through the roads of Malibu and all of these back roads and we were out in the middle of the tules, those things were done usually before daylight and after dark.

DAVE: *The car, The Black Beauty, I had read somewhere that the guy who customized it, I don't remember his name offhand . . .*

VAN: . . . **Dean Jefferies.**

DAVE: *That's right, Dean Jefferies. He threw in some other options that weren't used in the show. I remember reading that there was a closet in one of the seats. Do you remember anything like that?*

VAN: A guy has located the original car, and has gone back and put it all together with Dean. Dean's redoing it. Supposedly they had discovered that there was a thing that sprayed sand behind the rear wheels

“Bruce Lee was great. We were good friends.”

for traction. That thing is there and in that car. There was also a major gas type gun and supposedly some rockets. Also, the thing that popped up out of the back of the trunk, that actually worked. It was like a little gyroscope. That was nothing but a TV camera where we could track somebody that was out in front of us . . .

DAVE: *. . . the Scanner . . .*

VAN: Yeah, Scanner, right. The back of the front seat folded down with all these buttons and gadgets and things that worked, and it actually worked and that was in that car, but I think they've taken it out of there now.

DAVE: *Where did they find the car at?*

VAN: I could give you the name of the guy that got the car and he could tell you, but he sent me before-and-after pictures and I can't believe the thing was just a mess! It was rusted, it was white, it had rust all over. They welded everything shut, the doors and everything else. The guy drove it around for years. I think he was supposedly an executive with ABC that bought that car. He probably got it for nothing.

DAVE: *The show's canceled, might as well give him the car. Here is a question I'm sure you've never been asked before. What was it like working with Bruce Lee?*

VAN: *(Laughter.)* Never been asked before?! That is the most-asked question . . . I tell you what, it was up until a couple of years ago, that's kind of fading out, I don't know. Bruce has got his own following and whatever and I think Bruce has gone beyond Kato and THE GREEN HORNET. But he was great. We got along great. We were good friends, had no problems. I just don't have anything bad to say about the guy. We were good buddies. Linda and Brandon, I guess the daughter was born after we didn't do the show anymore, but **Brandon Lee** was around. He was a great guy, and so was Linda. Linda's a doll. She's always been real nice. We were just good friends.

DAVE: *Did you know that they are making a movie on Bruce Lee?*

VAN: I know. I did a part in it.

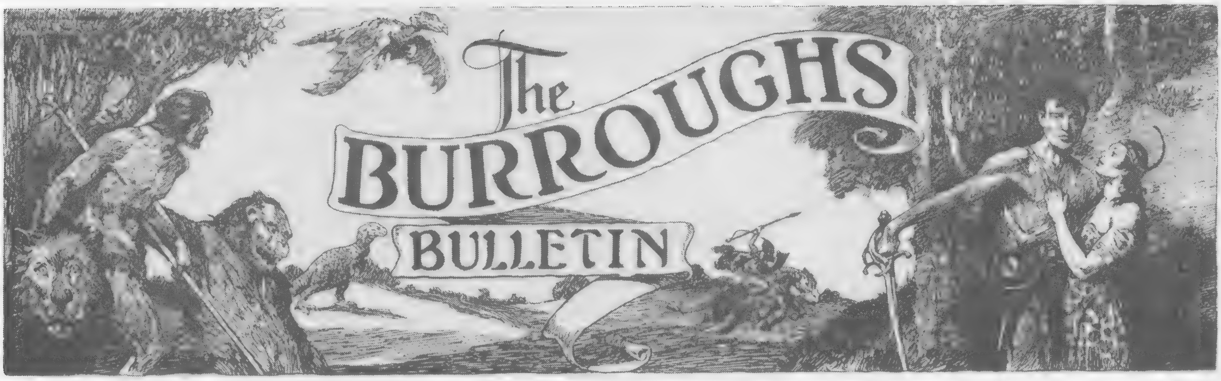
DAVE: *What part? Did you play yourself?*

VAN: I played the director who directed Britt Reid. They had two or three different sequences in there just to tell about Bruce, that role being very important to his career and that he went on beyond there. It was kind of strange *(Laughter.)* **Bob Wagner** (HART TO HART) who played **William Dozier** the executive producer, we were sitting around at a dinner, my wife, the director's wife, Vicki, and me were sitting there talking to Britt Reid or **Van Williams!** The guy they got to play him was some kid from Hawaii who looks a lot like Bruce. He's bigger than Bruce, and moves a lot like Bruce did. Nice kid. The gal who played Linda was the little blonde gal that plays on PICKET FENCES, the little cop. Good little actress, nice gal.

DAVE: *My mom likes that show. On his weapons in the show, those darts he threw, was that really him throwing the darts and them landing exactly where they were supposed to?*

VAN: No. They'd have him throwing something, you'd see it go out of frame, they'd change the other angle and come back, then the special-effects guy would

Van Williams and Bruce Lee on the beach.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“Bruce did not want to lose to Burt Ward.”

put them on a string or do something with them where they're landing exactly where you want them.

DAVE: *On the BATMAN crossover, I understand there was an interesting story when it came to Bruce Lee there . . .*

VAN: Bruce did not want to do it because in the original version of it he lost to **Burt Ward.** *(Laughter.)* Bruce said, “There is no way I am going to get into a fight with **Burt Ward** and lose!”

The shows were not alike at all. They were so different; the whole thing was just bologna getting us over there. Our ratings were not as strong as BATMAN's. Even though we were winning our time slot, they wanted to pick up more people. So they took us over there and tried to get the BATMAN crowd to watch us, which didn't work. We were totally different. We were trying to play it serious, they were trying to play it as a joke. Their whole deal was it's an irony and we're playing games and tongue-in-cheek and the whole bit. Here Bruce and I are being serious about being crime fighters, and they're playing games with it. So the whole thing didn't work; it never worked from the beginning. They made a stamp out of us or something like that.

DAVE: (Laughter.) *Yeah, I remember that. You mentioned you were winning your time slot.*

VAN: Yes.

DAVE: *Yet you got canceled?*

VAN: We got canceled because politics did more to it and everything else. **Dozier** had decided evidently that the only way he could afford to do the show was to do it as an hour. We did two of the last shows as hour shows, and split them in half. Our problem with it was as opposed to BATMAN, BATMAN did an hour show and split it in half, but it was on Wednesday and Thursday night. When we did a Friday to Friday, they felt there was way too much time lapse to keep the continuity of the show going. So they said, “There's no way we're going to do it as an hour. You're winning your time slot. It's a half-hour show against two hour shows, and we're not going to give you the hour.” So **Dozier** said, “If you're not going to give me the hour I'm not going to do it because I can't afford to.” THE GREEN HORNET was a very, very expensive show. Probably at that time it was the most expensive show done on TV.

DAVE: *More expensive than BATMAN was?*

VAN: Oh yeah, because BATMAN was done as an hour, and as an hour show you've got the right to write off sets and do all this other stuff that you don't have on a half-hour. As I understood it, our

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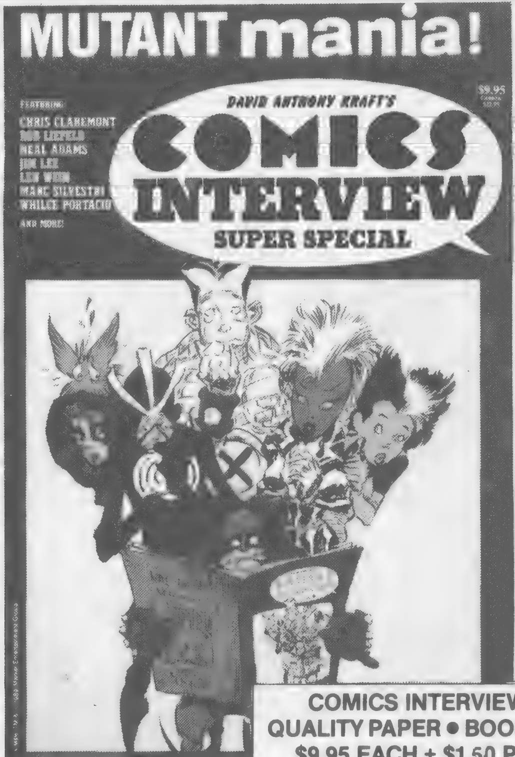
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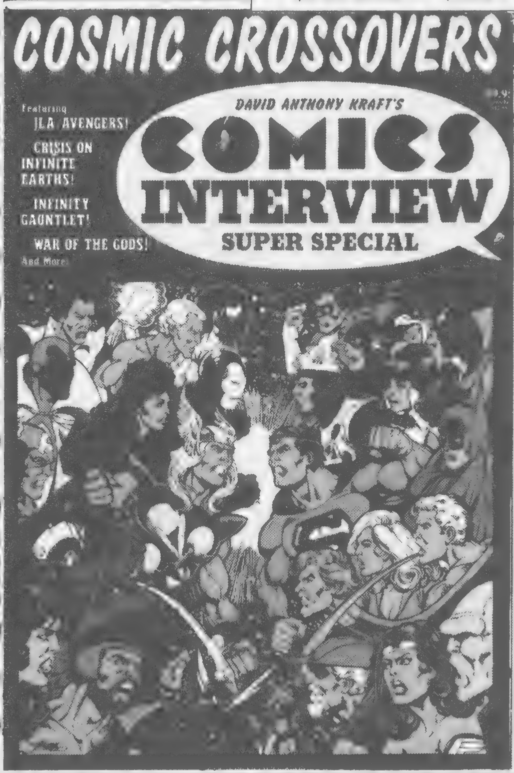
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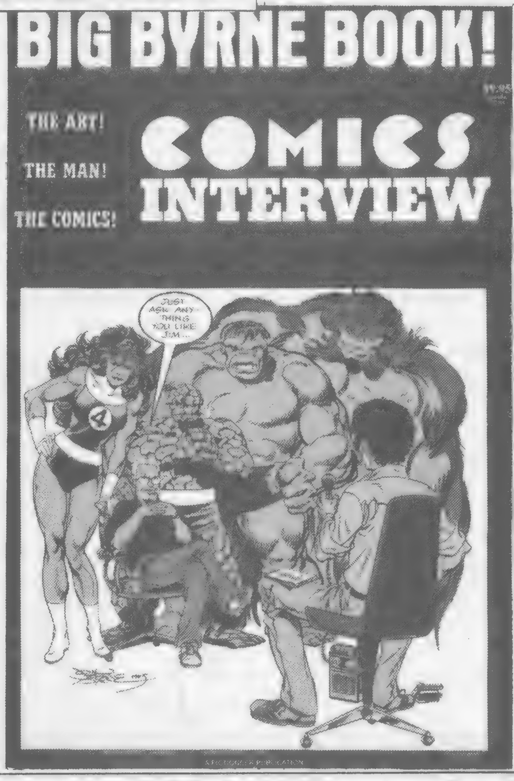
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"GREEN HORNET was a very expensive show."

half-hour show was costing the same thing as a BATMAN hour show, and he had two nights to show that hour show on and one night to show ours. So it was costing a fortune. Those were things that did come out of it. I found that out mostly from 20th Century Fox executives. That may not be the reason, but that's what I heard. Right up until the last minute we were scheduled to work for the next year. **Dozier** had gone back to the executives and said, "This is what we need. We don't have enough time to get in all of the things that we're trying to get into a half-hour show, and we need it." They said, "We don't want to split up the deal. You're winning your time slot. We'd like to get more audience for that particular time slot, but we don't want to give you an hour." So the whole thing just died. There were negotiations and negotiations and I think it got to the point where they had to get something in there, and they just killed it.

DAVE: *So at what point did you find out that the show was canceled?*

VAN: I don't remember when it was. It was after we finished filming it. My agent already started pushing me to do something else. In fact, I think I'd already done a pilot for a series for the next year. It was a spin-off from BIG VALLEY.

DAVE: *A lot of younger people today don't realize that westerns were big then.*

VAN: Yeah, but that was the beginning of the end of the westerns. It's just like the year before when I did PURSUE AND DESTROY. That was the beginning of the end for the military series. They didn't want any more of those. Two years later I did a spin-off from BIG VALLEY. They went right down to the wire with that one and didn't pick that one up. That was the end of the westerns. They all started dying off after that.

DAVE: *So how did you get into law enforcement?*

VAN: I got involved with a couple of federal agencies when I was doing THE GREEN HORNET. Through that I was doing some work with LAPD and some of the local agencies around here. It just kind of took off. I pretty much decided when I was doing THE GREEN HORNET to get out of the business and make acting my hobby and get into some other thing. I looked at a number of different things to do. I decided I wanted to do law enforcement and I was too old to get involved with it at that time so I went in as a reserve. I've been a reserve for 22 years now with the LA County Sheriff. I've just stayed with that. Then I got into the communications business and that's what I have now. I've got a company called

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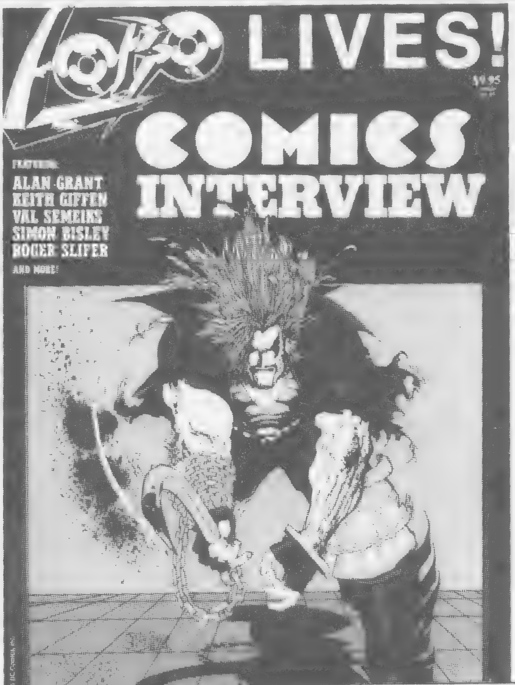
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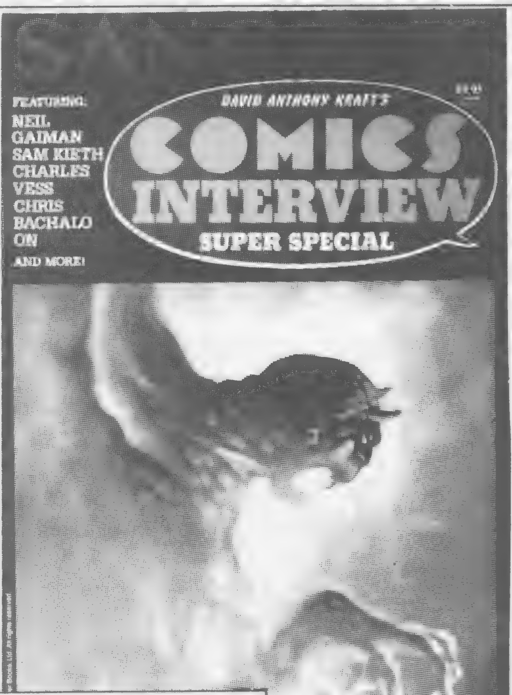
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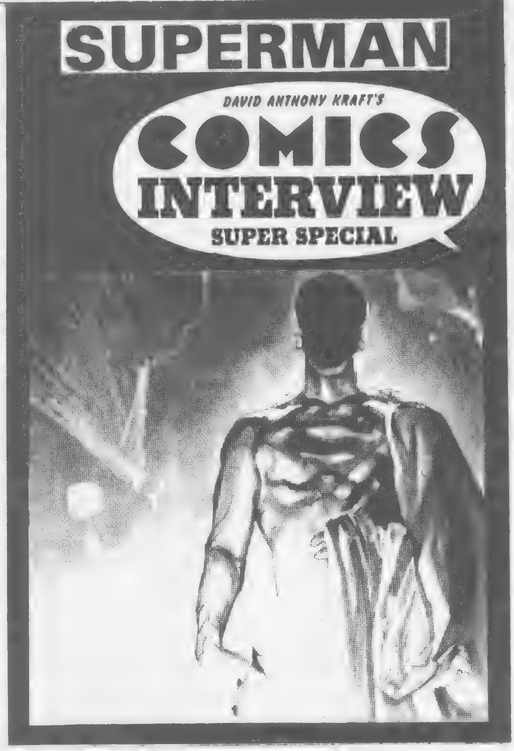
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"I decided to do law enforcement."

KHM Communications in Santa Monica and we rent pagers and handitalkies and do two-way radio and all this other stuff.

DAVE: *I saw in the newspaper not too long ago someone was using your frequency, and you tracked them down. What's the story behind that?*

VAN: We have what we call these doppler systems. We use them in law enforcement, which are radio tracking devices. You put them in a van, and you can track them right to the point where they're transmitting. We traced the guys down. We got a big deal against them. Got them for grand theft of air time which was the first it had ever been done in the United States. I got a real nice city attorney to help me out. A guy from LAPD Homicide who really did a good job. Both of these guys had to be educated; nobody knew what the heck I was talking about. Even though cops use radios all the time they don't understand the basic principles of it. To make a long story short, we got a case, we got the guys, we got them arrested. Some of them went to jail.

DAVE: *In the newspaper there was this big headline, "THE GREEN HORNET RETURNS — WELL, SORT OF."*

VAN: They just had a thing on it on ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT too.

DAVE: *I missed that. I kicked myself when I missed that.*

VAN: It was a good one. They did a real good job. They did like a ten-minute deal on that. That was about the third or fourth one of those that I've done. They kept doing all of that stuff, and the only reason I did them is to kind of promote my company here. Well, they'd come out, they'd interview me here at my desk, and show all my radios and this and that. That would never end up on TV. The only thing that did was THE GREEN HORNET and working as a sheriff. Well, I didn't want to promote the sheriff; that's neat but it didn't make my money.

DAVE: *What do you think of the fans today?*

VAN: **Adam West** got me started going out three or four years ago because he kept saying, "God, I wish you'd go out on these promos and answer some of these questions, because I can't answer them about THE GREEN HORNET." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "There are all sorts of people out there who are big fans of that show." I said, "You've got to be kidding!" To make a long story short, the thing has a big following out there. I've been to a number of different shows where there's been thousands and thousands of people and signed all of these autographs. I had no idea this stuff

“Bruce Lee and the GREEN HORNET show

was going on! I was off on another tangent. I wasn't even dealing with it. I've been very appreciative to know that after all that hard work, that both Bruce and I did, that somebody appreciated it, and there are a lot of people that do.

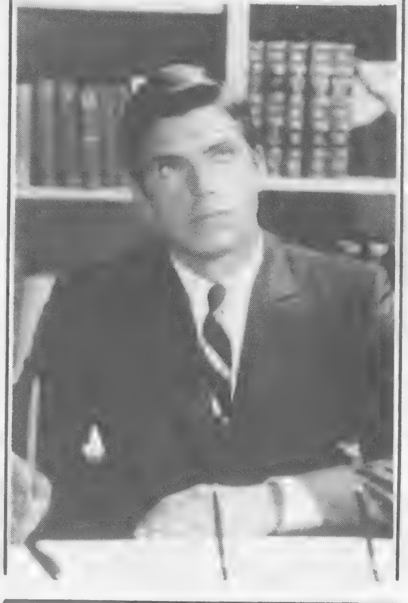
DAVE: *Are you surprised at the popularity of the show?*

VAN: Yeah, I really am. Until just recently I had no idea that the show really had that much. It's got kind of a clan following like some of the other shows that were done in those days. The thing that got me was, I'd go out to these shows and these people would ask me all sorts of things about the show that hadn't been on hardly since 1965, and I didn't remember a thing about any of them! I didn't remember who the guest stars were or anything. I went to 20th Century Fox and I said, “Hey, give me a set of those shows.” They did when we shot some promos to try to syndicate the show. The show is very hard to syndicate because there's only 26 shows and both Bruce's estate and I still get paid for that stuff.

DAVE: *So you still get residuals?*

VAN: Yes. Adam doesn't. He's way beyond getting residuals on that thing. So they could promote that show, play it as much as they want, and they don't pay anybody for it, it's 100% net. My show, we're up to the point where we're paid for each show, and there's only 26 of them. It's been a very hard show to syndicate.

We worked our butts off on that show. Really tried to make a go of it, and then I felt that the network let us down. I felt **Dozier** let us down to a certain extent. Just kind of pulled the carpet out. I kind of got my nose bent out of shape and so did Bruce on that deal. Bruce had a lot of popularity on that show, and the show actually had a lot of popularity. I keep running into people all the time that say, “Yeah, we watched that show a lot more than we did BATMAN. We'd laugh at BATMAN and then we'd turn on to get serious about THE GREEN HORNET.” So many people said that, and they say it now, that BATMAN to them was a joke, it was funny. That it was not serious, and it was kind of a gimmicky deal. When they went to THE GREEN HORNET, this was a serious crime fighter that wanted to get out and do something. The most frequent comment I hear from the public is that they looked upon the Green Hornet as a great role model. I've never heard that said about Batman. Maybe so, I don't know.



DAVE: *What do you think of the more recent Batman films, the switch from the campy to The Dark Knight.*

VAN: To be honest with you, I didn't pay much attention to it. But I thought what they were trying to do with the movies was to make it like the old comic books, and that was not true either. I don't know whose idea it was to make it camp, the BATMAN series, but I didn't feel like that was fair to the Batman thing. Then they do another switcheroo and go to the guy you don't know whether he is really good or bad. They've done a hell of a job promoting it, but I don't think they did a good job on it.

If they do this GREEN HORNET movie, I'd love to see them stick to the had a lot of popularity. BATMAN was a joke."

"Green Hornet was a serious crime-

fighter, a vigilante, like the Lone Ranger.”

basic premise of what it was: A serious crime fighter who was a vigilante, just like the Lone Ranger was. A guy that is an outstanding businessman in the community, that's fed up with the crime and the criminal system, the criminal justice system just like what we got right now. Cops are so frustrated, they can't get anything done because we're battling the courts,

"Cops are frustrated, battling the

we're battling the judges, we're battling everybody. So he just goes out and does his own thing. I'm not saying it's the right way and that I would do it, but it's a way of getting around the red tape that has come up with the criminal justice system. This was 1965, where we weren't having anywhere near the problems that we are now.

courts, judges, we're battling everybody."

“Comics succeed only when the *other side* is interested

The word mostly associated with the name Bane Kerac in his home country — from the very beginning of his rich and busy career —used to be professional, *the hardcore one. He managed to enter the field of sequential art with such a serious and studious approach that it had to result in the constant presence in every serious publication of comic strips, popularity among fans and colleagues comparable to that of show-biz stars and, logically, break-through into the international comics scene on both sides of the Atlantic. Before orientation towards writing his own scripts, Bane used to work with Svetozar Obradovic as his most distinguished writer.*

After steady appearances on the markets of (ex)Yugoslavia, Scandinavian countries, Germany, France and the rest of Europe, in the format of comics-anthologies and graphic novels, Bane finally broke into comics in the country of their origin — the United States! His international career was launched with the co-operation of Ervin Rustemagic, one of Europe's most serious and best producer agents of such stalwarts as Hermann Hupen, Victor DeLa Fuente, Cavazzano, Jean Mitton, Colin Willson, Joe Kubert, Sergio Aragones etc. Bane's superhero (semi-spoof) serial CATCLAW now appears in the U.S.

Just to remind folks of the obvious: long before, Bane was already there, in the nucleus of something which is blossoming right now . . .

Press photo from a TV show dedicated to Bane and his creation, Catclaw. Model costumed as Catclaw is Daniela Peyic (19).

BOJAN M. DJUKIC: *How does it feel when a European cartoonist — from Yugoslavia — appears in the French publication which is called COMICS USA? They only used to publish exclusively translated comics by American authors and artists . . .*

BRANISLAV (BANE) KERAC: It is not so unusual as it seems at first glance. Anyway, many of the American authors are not Americans, other than in passport only, and I assume that the number in it doesn't influence too much the inspiration. Seriously speaking, the fact is that COMICS USA tends to publish works which are done *the American way* — not exclusively of American origin. If someone from Timbuktu creates something that has essential premises of American comics, there is no reason not to publish that in COMICS USA, right?

BOJAN: *Well, right . . .*

BANE: And maybe they were “seduced” by the fact that my name does not sound Eastern, who knows . . .?

BOJAN: *American visual narrative has influenced you from the beginning. Who were the most important authors and when did you turn towards the European influences? And which were they?*

BANE: Everything depended on what was published in Yugoslavia and when. Meaning it all began with **Alex Raymond, Hal Foster** and **Dan Barry.** After them entered the French — **Jije, Macherot, Franquin** (well, he's Belgian) — then Americans again, mostly from Marvel and DC, exactly at the time when I decided to start seriously with the cartooning profession. That means **John Romita, Sr.** above all, then **Neal Adams, John Buscema, Rudy Nebres** (and he is actually from the Philippines). Incoming expansion of French and Spanish cartoonists was very evident in Yugoslavia, so it was natural that all of us were

All artwork accompanying this interview ©1992 Branislav (Bane) Kerac

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in what the cartoonist squeezes out of himself/herself.”

infected by the viruses of **Jean “Moebius” Giraud, Hermann, Alphonso Font, Jordi Bernet** and the rest of the gang.

BOJAN: *Yet, with all those influences you managed to remain on your own as an authentic creator.*

BANE: Obviously, I’ve never typecast myself as an imitator of the great masters of comics. I strive to pull out of chosen ones’ works the most useful experiences, to analyze them and create my own solutions. There are many artists who have, for example, the **Romita, Sr.** clear image of his old DAREDEVILs but without his camera angles and editing/directing; so they’re closer to the European style and spirit.

BOJAN: *Can you explain your case of being inspired with the movies? Which are your most favorite genres, directors and actors?*

BANE: Well, in a broad overview, the movies had to leave the trace of their influence not only on my work, but on the majority of cartoonists, simply because it’s difficult to state clearly if the movies are comic-booky or the comics are movie-like! From **Eisenstein’s** storyboarded scripts to the comic-based films of today, media are so mixed in interaction that sometimes I don’t know whether I am director or cartoonist. **Sergio Leone, Don Siegel** and **Clint Eastwood** are the “real McCoys.” Everything else is “Art.” Only they are the right stuff.

BOJAN: *Was it difficult to become internationally recognized with such strong competition?*

BANE: It *is* difficult — but not in the sense that it’s something unbearable. All you need is work and a lot of patience and if work is the pleasure — as is the case with cartooning — then the time factor, spending the time at work counts as “difficulty.” Anyhow, the ingredients for the success are 10% talent, 10% work and 100% luck. The first 20% you have to value in the context of approximately two decades and nearly 3000 pages drawn.

Seriously speaking, I worked the best I knew and could, respecting my role models. Like in every form of communication, comics succeed only when the *other side* is interested in what the cartoonist squeezes out of himself/herself. I just suppose that my works have the necessary dose of something specific . . . but I wouldn’t like to talk about that; I’d leave that to someone competent and interested.

BOJAN: *Your energy and devotion to working habits seem awesome and boundless; how did you manage to build your self-discipline and professional attitude?*

BANE: I nailed my feet under the drawing table.

BOJAN: *Describe the process of creating, say, one page of your strip. How do you approach the cartooning?*

BANE: Simply said, I live along with my characters and creations. If they have no idea what’s going to happen on the next page, beats me if I know what the hell’s going on . . .

BOJAN: *But we know that every author has his/her own approach and way . . .*

BANE: Approximately, I assume what’s

BANE KERAC

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Branislav (Bane) Kerac (no matter how they explain the pronunciation elsewhere, it sounds exactly like *Bruh-nee-slav (Buh-nae) Khe-ruts* — honest!)

Born: 1950 in Novi Sad, Serbia (ex-Yugoslavia)

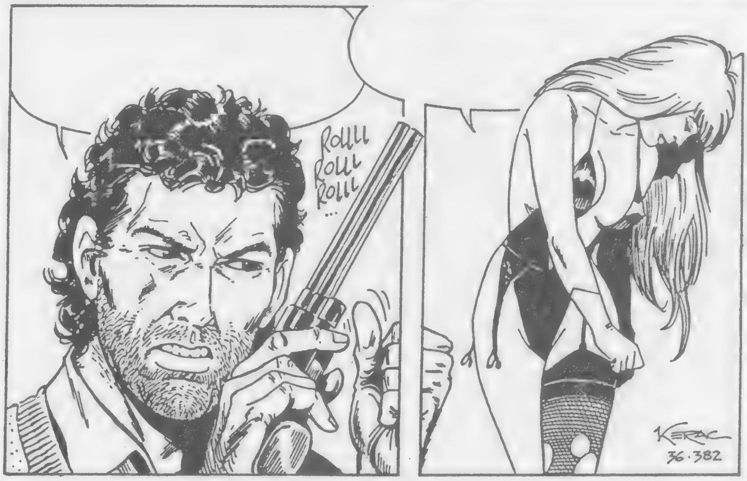
Education: No formal art training, completely self-taught; left the studies at the University to devote all the time, love and passion to the comics

First professional work: Around 1975

Favorite pastime: good’n’loud Rock’n’Roll, collecting records and CD’s, being good husband and father of two boys.

Most important influences on work: Everything from the printed comic page, to the originals, to the movies; milestones were **Giraud, Hermann, Pepe Gonzales, Rudy Nebres, John Romita Sr.,** and any good piece of authentic visual storytelling.

Most favorite drawing tools: Mechanical pencil with thin 0.5 lead, rather stiffer BRAUSE 511 or 513 dip-pen; Rotring ink; any non-split-hair brush, kid-finish sturdy illustration board; Staedtler plastic erasers and lotsa Turkish coffee and loud music thru the earplugs.



Catclaw from the “City Cat” episode

“Fuck the bloke who doesn’t drink or smoke and

going to happen, of course, but I let the bits and details lead me somewhere more interesting. For example, from the episode of CATCLAW in which the trial of Catminator was supposed to be the main event and the brawl in the courtroom, the support cast bullies became Cat’s main opponents only because I was listening at the time to the record of the band called **Helloween** with “E” (the German heavy metal band) and being inspired with the creatures from the sleeve of their LIVE album.

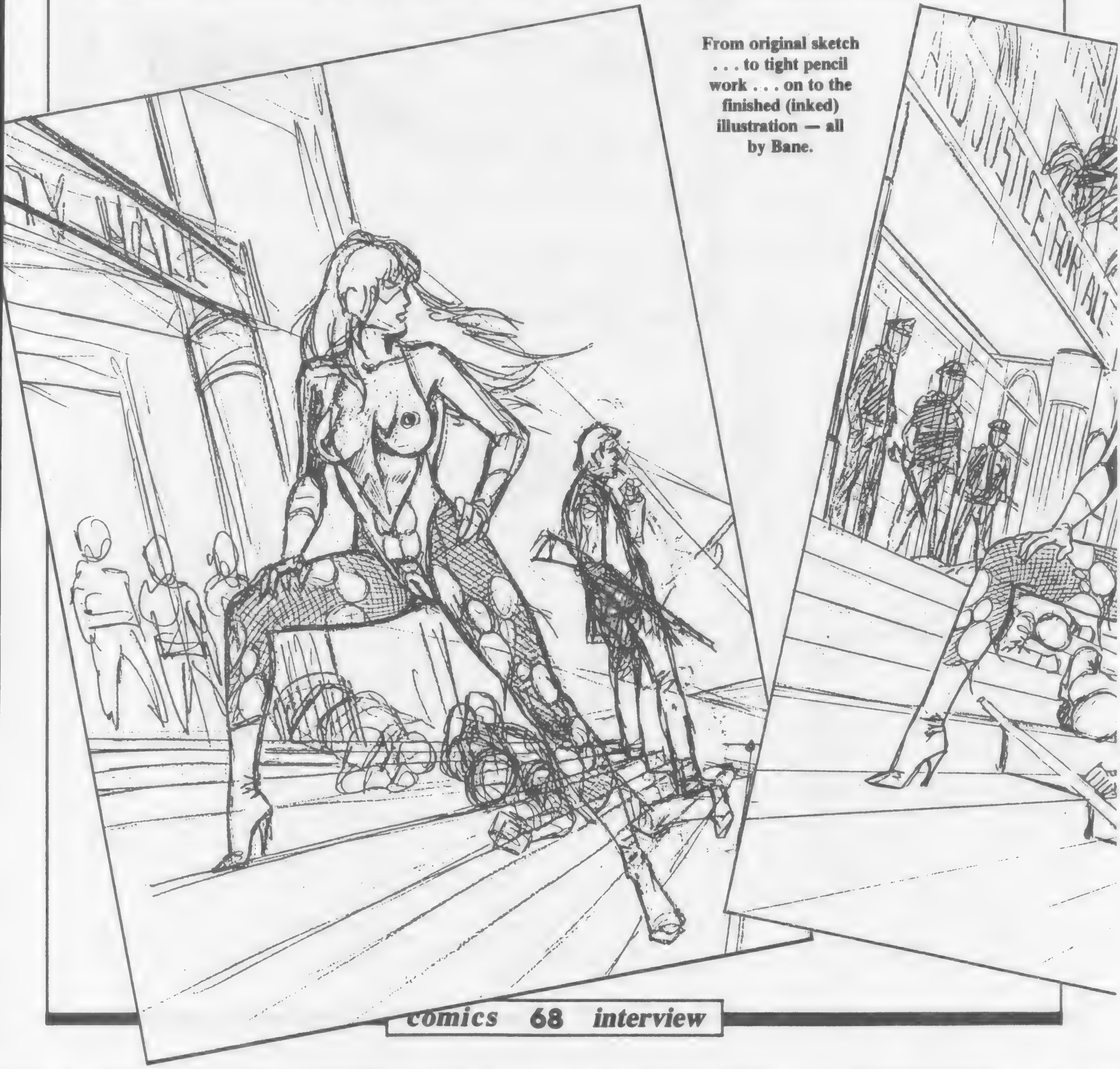
The system is simple: the last panel inspires the next one and so it goes until “The End.” That’s why my episodes don’t have the conventional length. They are executed in the scheme: one logical complete story consists of 3x10 pages or 8x10 pages and so on . . . When I’m confined to, say, a graphic-novel format of 44 pages, in the morning I hate myself and in the afternoon the rest of the world — because it irritates me to think about page sixteen while I still draw page four. What if the death of my main character happens on page eight?!?

BOJAN: *It sure is news for me that you don’t execute the precise* scenario *in advance, but rather improvise during the working process . . . by the way, are you influenced in your work by the realization that you’re present in the world’s comic market? Are you more motivated and studious . . .?*

BANE: In what sense?

BOJAN: *I remember that your pencilling used to be very free and loose; tightening of the drawing came during the inking phase; why did you switch to tighter, more precise pencilling?*

BANE: Mainly because of other inkers. I wanted to make the assignment more easy for them, but lately I’m splitting hairs more and more because . . . because there’s no more fiddlin’ around. At the beginning, when I used to be nonchalant, such things were not so important. Now when I’ve joined the “Club of the Famous” I have to be more responsible in the relation towards the quality of the actual drawing. I am not the kind of a guy who would skip the correct approach to the work. They don’t say it as an empty phrase: *More pain —more gain.* But only based on the solid fundamentals, I would add.



From original sketch . . . to tight pencil work . . . on to the finished (inked) illustration — all by Bane.

screws antelopes instead of Queen La of Opar!"

BOJAN: *Tell me about your Yugoslavian phase, then work on the licensed properties, etc. . .*

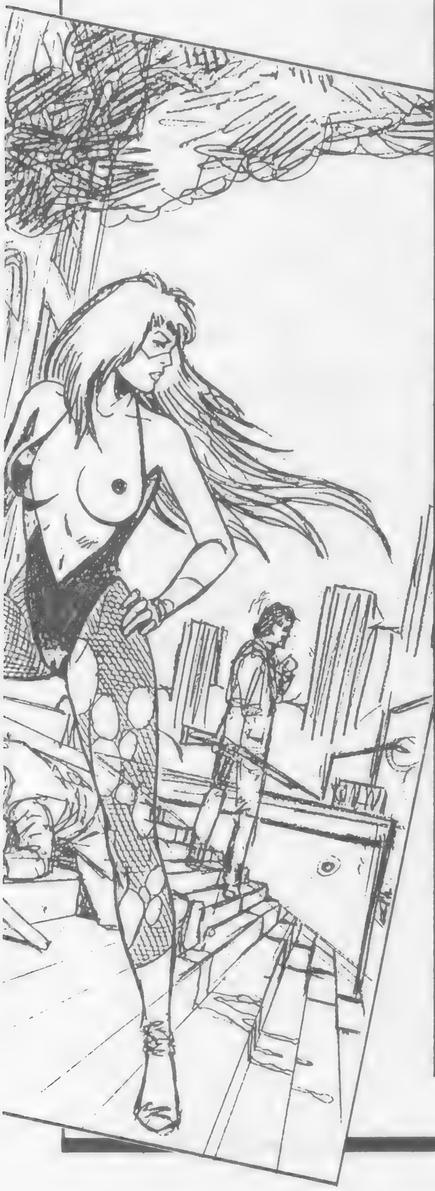
BANE: My very first comic strip was published in 1975 and it was an adventure World War II story, a serial called LIEUTENANT TARA. After that, in 1978, I began KOBRA THE STUNTMAN, and CATCLAW was born in 1981. At the same time, along with KOBRA (the first Yugoslavian martial arts comic) and CATCLAW, I drew and sometimes wrote licensed properties such as IL GRANDE BLACK MACIGNO and TARZAN. I didn't work on BLACK for too long, maybe only three or four episodes but I managed to squeeze out more than 1000 pages of TARZAN and I could hardly wait to get rid of him. I've never encountered a more bland hero — mainly because of the (in)famous 26 rules about handling his personality and such — but it was work and I didn't cheat. Fuck the bloke who doesn't drink or smoke and screws antelopes instead of Queen La of Opar!

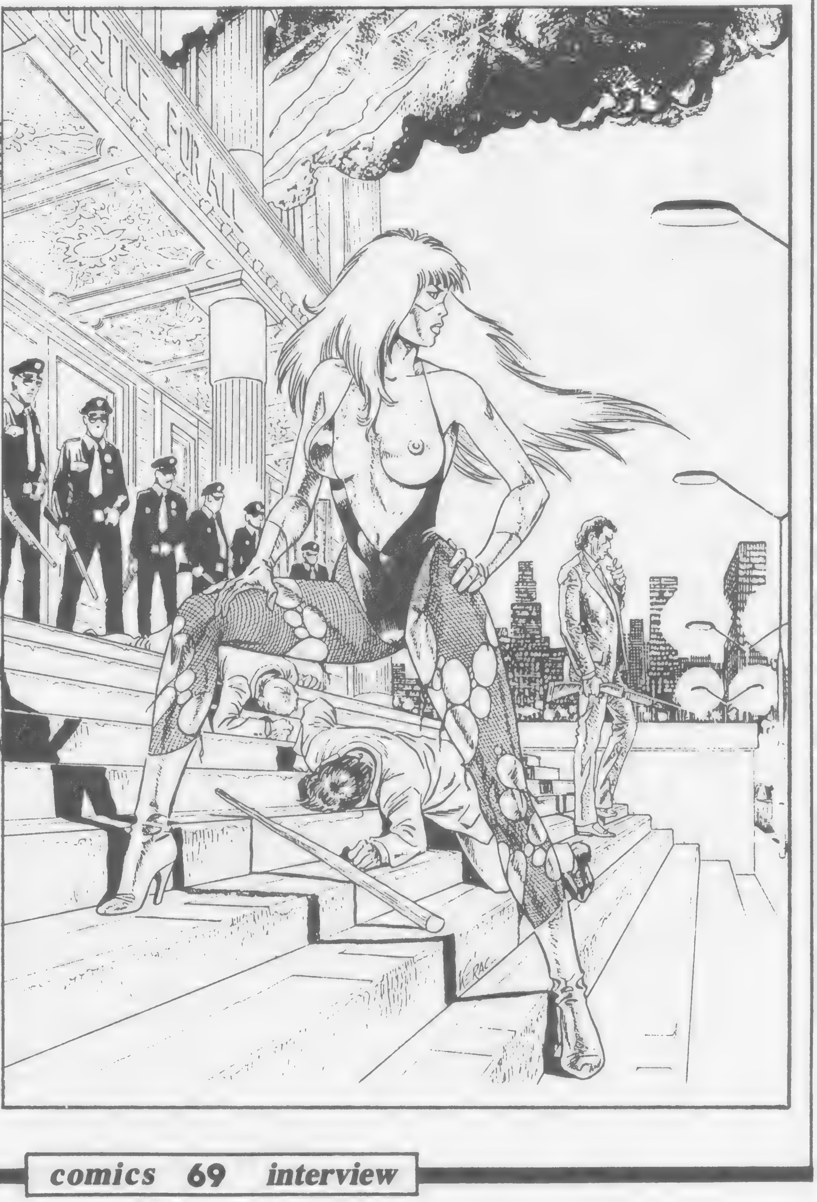
BOJAN: *Do you see yourself staying in comics for the long term or do you plan to move on to something else — say, animation, illustration or maybe work in the film industry?*

BANE: No . . . I care only for comics. Of course, I won't refuse some interesting offers in other media if they happened — but strictly on a short-term basis! Can you imagine a dentist with a sting in cardio-vascular surgery?!?

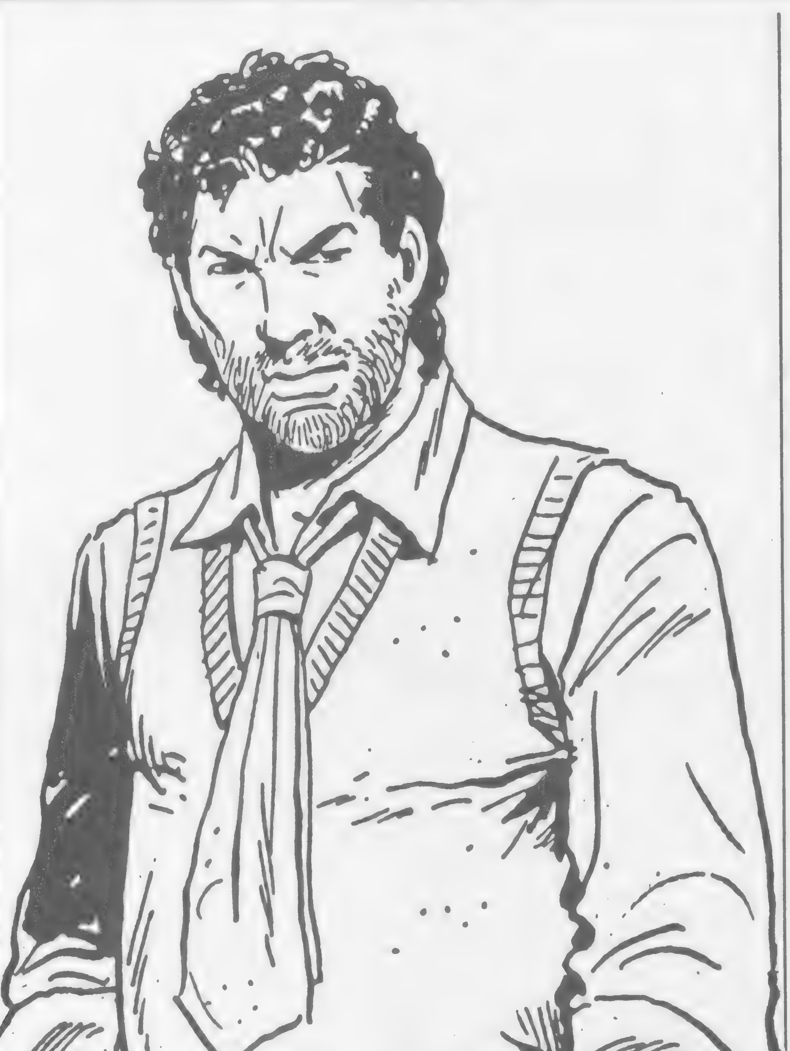
BOJAN: *Do you consider further polishing your skills in the context of a European approach to comic strips — or are you more interested, as your British colleagues mostly are, in breaking further into the American market to work for, say, Dark Horse, Marvel or DC?*

BANE: For now I am where I am. As we say in our proverb, *Every wonder lasts for three days.* Well, in "three days span" I'll begin something new. I don't divide comics into the European and the American approach — because I create some kind of fusion of all these stereotypes, with new results. I'll stick further to my intuition and my personal feelings towards the comics. If that would resemble a Madascarian approach to the medium to somebody, well, let it be!





"It's not hard to imagine Kim Basinger as Catclaw, huh?"



BOJAN: *Do you follow what is happening in sequential art worldwide?*

BANE: All I could say is that, thanks to my producer, **Mr. Ervin Rustemagic,** I'm very well informed of what's happening on the comics scene of our global village.

But am I interested? Well, yes . . . yes, I am — but not in a way I used to be some ten years ago. Now I'm much cooler when I observe something distinguished (I decline from the expression "indifferent") and I pay less and less attention to the total *turkeys,* according to my opinion. I am more inclined to observing rationally the real values.

BOJAN: *Did you ever have an impression that in our country, Yugoslavia, it was almost impossible to make much of a success in publishing? I mean, are our cartoonists "doomed" to seek work and recognition abroad in pursuing their chosen career?*

BANE: Aw, that would be a long story . . . Let's say briefly that out of ten possible worst things for comics publishing, nine happened in our country. It's a miracle that we managed to reach the point we're at! Anyway, it ain't that bad. Good, qualified cartoonists could always live out of their craft but, lately, because of the known factors (war and other bullshit) it's difficult for all other areas of life — not to mention art and such. It will be better . . . one day.

BOJAN: *Today many comic-book/strip creations are being adapted for the movies and/or TV. Which creation of yours would work in that context and how would you like to be engaged in such a venture, eventually?*

BANE: I suppose that my comics are very easy to be adapted for the movies. I reckon it's not difficult to imagine **Kim Basinger** in the role of CATCLAW, huh? Under such conditions I'd agree to clap the sequence/scene board for the crew in front of the camera. *(Laughter.)*

BOJAN: *Did you ever wish to share your knowledge with others through the form of a book or tutorial? Do you mind sharing your "secrets" with would-be cartoonists? Do you have an inclination to be an educator at all?*

BANE: Too many questions at once for such a subject. No, I'm not selfish enough to keep my professional achievements and/or opinions just for myself as some kind of a secret. I've always helped (and I'll continue to do so) my younger colleagues, as my commitments let me.

Considering any such plans of the publishing kind, I intend to . . . well, let's keep it as a small secret for awhile, okay?

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

HEART "REN"CHING FACTS

Dear DAK;

I really enjoyed issue #122, especially the REN & STIMPY interviews. However, in **Dan Slott's** interview, he claims, "the two scents (of the air foulers bagged with #1) are nothing alike!" I have both kinds of foulers and can emphatically state — THEY ARE, TOO! Furthermore, neither smells like a litter box or wet dog (I've had experience with both). Rather, they smell more like that odor the gas companies add to natural gas to alert you to leaks.

Also, Ren does not have a German accent. It's more like a Spanish accent. Far more appropriate for a chihuahua, which originated in Mexico, I'd say. And the Psycho Ren figures on page 13 are from "Sven Hoek," not "Haunted House."

May you always buy cheap and sell dear.

Derek K. Carrow
9305-14 Dodson's Crossroads
Chapel Hill, NC 27516

Y'know, Derek, as Dan Slott might well say, take that issue of REN & STIMPY into the toilet and use it lieu of the customary tissue — now, you tell us, what's the scent like? Then again, Dan Slott would probably never say such a thing. But Ren sure wouldn't hesitate!

—DAK

DESPERATELY SEEKING SHAZAM!

Dear **Mr. Kraft:**

I recently read issue #122 of COMICS INTERVIEW. I really enjoyed the article on **Marc Swayze,** the artist on the original Golden Age Captain Marvel and Mary Marvel. I'd like to know are there any plans for an interview on the upcoming Captain Marvel graphic novel by **Jerry Ordway** and on the possible new series? I am also trying to find the present addresses of the following actors from the 1974-77 live action CBS SHAZAM Saturday morning TV series: **Michael Gray** — Billy Batson; **Jackson Bostwick** — Captain Marvel; **John Davey** — Captain Marvel; and **Les Tremayne** — Mentor. This would really mean a great deal to me. I would gladly pay for these addresses.

Thank you very much — have a nice day.

Michael Mikulovsky
8723 W. Greenfield Ave. #253
West Allis, WI 53214

No need to pay us, Michael — other than compliments, anyway. Hey, we'll throw it open to the vast industry insider network that looks to INTERVIEW for the real no bullshit comics scene coverage: Can anyone help with these addresses?

— DAK

INTERVIEW welcomes your thoughts and comments in the Last Word. Send your correspondence to: DAK, COMICS INTERVIEW, 234 Fifth Ave., Suite 301, New York, NY 10001, or fax your letter to (706) 782-6625. Please include your name and address.

INTERVIEW reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity.

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OH, BOY, REN! HOW DO WE DO IT?
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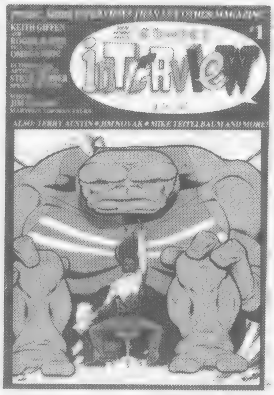
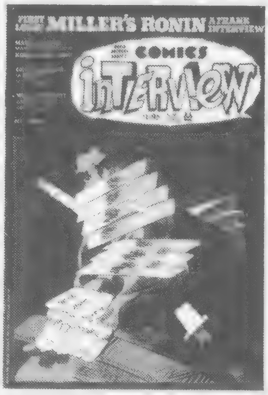
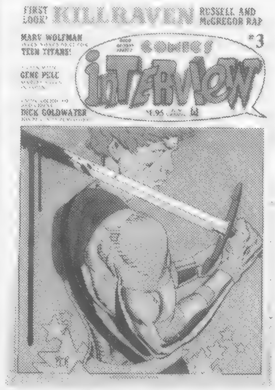

Comics Interview
#1

#1-$5.00 Keith Giffen on the making of THE OMEGA MEN — **Steve Gerber** speaks out on comics — X-MEN inker **Terry Austin** talks — Marvel's top man, **Jim Galton,** tells all — and much more in this premiere issue!


MILLER'S RONIN
Comics Interview

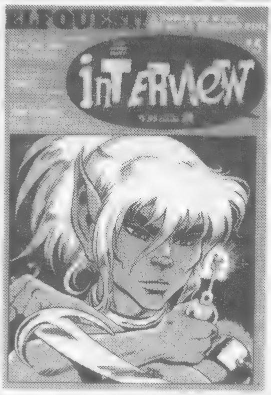
#2-$5.00 Miller raps about RONIN — **Mark Evanier** shares secrets of **Kirby's** NEW GODS — **Steve Gerber** asks **Will Meugniot** about DNAGENTS — **Gene Simmons** of KISS on comics — more! Cover by **Frank Miller.**


KILLRAVEN
Comics Interview
#3

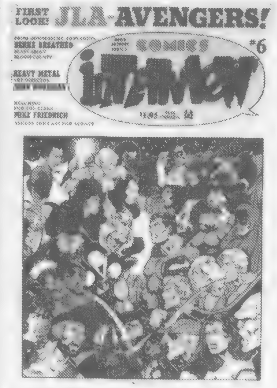
#3 COUNTS AS FIVE Don McGregor & Craig Russell on KILLRAVEN — Origins of NEW TEEN TITANS told by **Marv Wolfman — Howard Chaykin** on AMERICAN FLAGG — French comics by **Neal Adams** — Cover by **Russell.**

Comics Interview

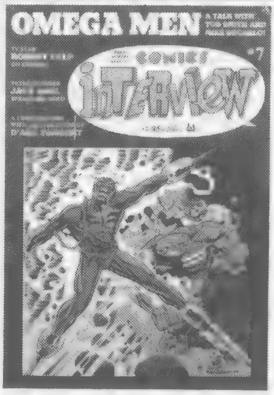
#4 COUNTS AS FIVE Starlin speaks about **WARLOCK, CAPTAIN MARVEL & DREADSTAR — DC's Dick Giordano**, part 1 — from **Foster** to **Frazetta**, the last **Roy G. Krenkel** interview — Cover by **Starlin.**


ELFQUEST!
Comics Interview
#5

#5-$5.00 Wendy & Richard Pini — inside ELFQUEST, part 1 — **Stan Lee**, straight from the shoulder — DC's **Dick Giordano** part 2 — Origins of COMICO. Cover by **Wendy Pini.**


FIRST LOOK! JLA-AVENGERS!
Comics Interview
#6

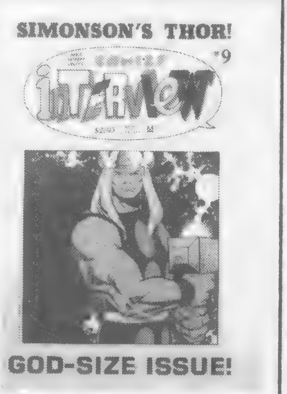
#6 COUNTS AS 3 George Perez & Roy Thomas tell all about JLA/AVENGERS feud — inside ELFQUEST, part 2 — **Berke Breathed** blabs about BLOOM COUNTY — more! Awesome cover by **Perez!**


OMEGA MEN
Comics Interview
#7

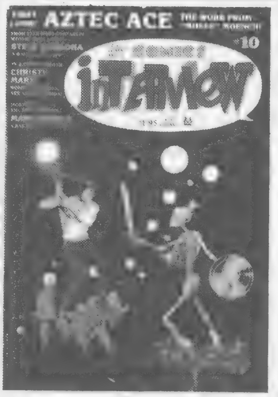
#7-$5.00 Artist **Tod Smith** — inker **Mike DeCarlo**, too — D'ARC TANGENT — TV star **Robert Culp** talks about comics — Marvel artist **Jack Abel** OMEGA MEN cover by **Smith & DeCarlo!**

NEXUS
Comics Interview
#8

#8 $5.00 Mike Baron and **Steve Grant** discuss NEXUS, WHISPER and BADGER — **Bill Griffith** talks about ZIPPY THE PINHEAD — **Richard Burton** on British comics — plus more! Cover by **Steve Rude.**


SIMONSON'S THOR!
Comics Interview
#9
GOD-SIZE ISSUE!

#9 COUNTS AS FIVE GOD-SIZE ISSUE **Walt Simonson**, the man and his art — grand master **Joe Kubert** gabs — A walk down memory lane with comics giant **Gardner Fox** — much, much more!! THOR cover by **Simonson.**


AZTEC ACE
Comics Interview
#10

#10-$5.00 Doug Moench on his SF series — from **Starlin** to STAR WARS, a wacky interview with **Steve Leialoha — Christy Marx** on women, sex and RED SONJA — more! ACE cover by **Hernandez & Yeates.**

MORE PAGES! MORE INTERVIEWS! MORE FUN!
X-MEN!
Comics Interview
#11

#11 SOLD OUT John Romita, Jr. talks about Marvel from IRON MAN to X-MEN — **Doug Moench** (part two) on his stormy career and the state of comics — inside Pacific Comics — more! X-MEN cover by **Romita!**

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GARCIA LOPEZ
Comics Interview

#12-$5.00 DC artist **Jose Luis Garcia Lopez** (TEEN TITANS, ATARI FORCE) — EC artist **Jack Davis** — TV's **Mr. Rogers** — star scripter **Alan Moore** talks about superheroes — **Louise Simonson** — more!

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COMICS INTERVIEW
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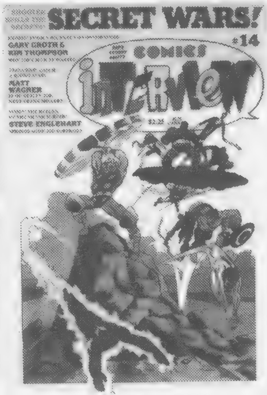
#13-$5.00 **Gerry Conway & Roy Thomas** sound off on scripting movies (Conan, Fire & Ice) and comics — a two-fisted talk with outspoken artist **Ernie Colon** — porn star **Kelly Nichols** — **Don Rosa** — more!


SECRET WARS!
COMICS INTERVIEW
#14

#14-$5.00 **Jim Shooter** talks about SECRET WARS! **Gary Groth** of COMICS JOURNAL! Scripter **Steve Englehart** sounds off on SILVER SURFER and other surprises! SECRET WARS cover by **Mike Zeck!**

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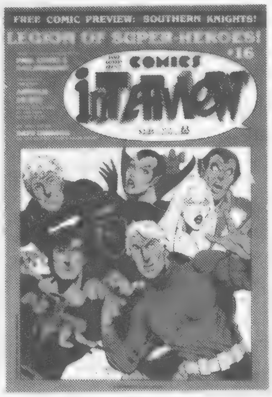
GRIMJACK!
COMICS INTERVIEW
#15

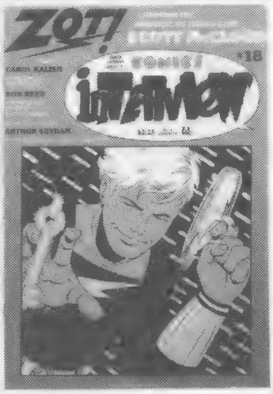
#15-$5.00 Co-creators **John Ostrander & Tim Truman** on GRIMJACK! VOID INDIGO artist **Val Mayerik! Richard Pini & Colleen Doran** on A DISTANT SOIL! Great cover by **Truman!**


FREE COMIC PREVIEW: SOUTHERN KNIGHTS!
LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES!
COMICS INTERVIEW
#16

#16-$5.00 THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES! Writer — and DC Vice President — **Paul Levitz**, and artist **Dan Jurgens** — DOOM PATROL creator & original X-MEN writer **Arnold Drake** rattles skeletons at DC!

ELEMENTALS!
COMICS INTERVIEW
#17

#17 COUNTS AS FIVE THE ELEMENTALS! Creator **Bill Willingham** talks about this super-group! **Jerry Grandenetti** his years with **Will Eisner!** — Golden Age great **Gaylord DuBois**. Cover by **Bill Willingham**


ZOT!
COMICS INTERVIEW
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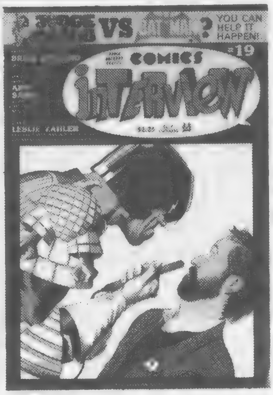
#18-$5.00 ZOT! writer/artist **Scott McCloud!** A rap with original CAPTAIN MARVEL writer & Golden Age great **Rod Reed** — HEAVY METAL artist **Arthur Suydam** — Marvel's **Carol Kalish!**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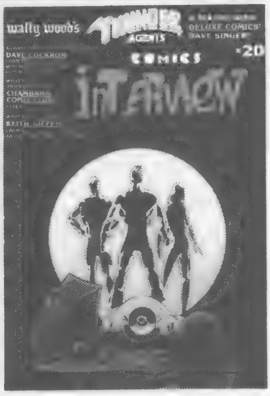
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THUNDER AGENTS
DELUXE COMICS' DAVE SINGER
COMICS INTERVIEW
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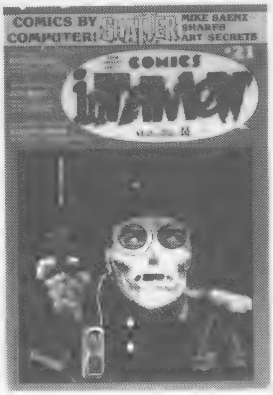
#20-$5.00 AMBUSH BUG alumnus **Keith Giffen** and X-MEN artist **Dave Cockrum** — publisher **Dave Singer** about the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS — news of the NIGHTCRAWLER mini-series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SHATTER
MIKE SAENZ SHARES ART SECRETS
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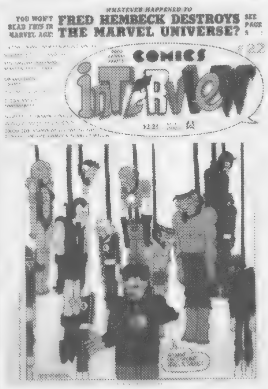
WHATEVER HAPPENED TO
FRED HEMBECK DESTROYS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE?
COMICS INTERVIEW
#22

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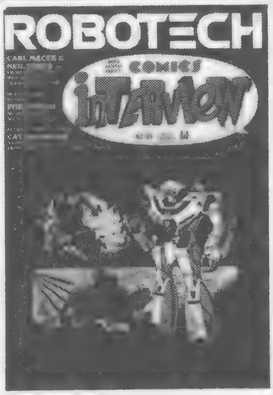
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COMICS INTERVIEW

#23-$5.00 The MYTH-ADVENTURES of fan favorite **Phil Foglio!** Artist **Neil Vokes** of Comico's ROBOTECH/MACROSS — inside story of Japanese comics, American style. Plus a conversation with **Cat Yronwode!**

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COMICS INTERVIEW
24

#24-$5.00 **Sal Buscema** breaks his long silence to talk all about the early days at Marvel — Writer **Max Collins** and artist **Terry Beatty** talk about MS. TREE! DC's **Karen Berger** on SWAMP THING. **T. M. Maple**, too.

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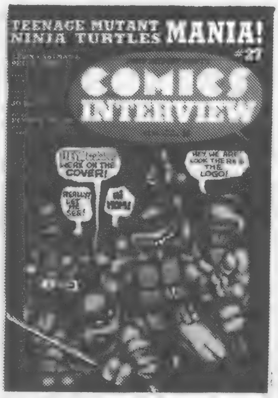
DC's CRISIS TEAM TALKS!
#26
COMICS INTERVIEW

#26 COUNTS AS FIVE **Marv Wolfman:** CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS—syndicated artist **Stan Drake**—DC Heroes Role-Playing Game designers talk about DC secrets—**George Perez** CRISIS cover!


TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES MANIA!
#27
COMICS INTERVIEW
HEY, WE'RE ON THE COVER!
REALLY? LET ME SEE!
HEY, WE ARE LOOK THERE'S THE LOGO!

#27-$5.00 TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES' **Eastman & Laird—Stan Drake,** part 2—Marvel's **Jo Duffy** on STAR WARS—Marvel & First writer **Peter B Gillis**—original TURTLES cover!

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YOU'VE READ THE HYPE—NOW FIND OUT THE FACTS!
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COMICS INTERVIEW
X

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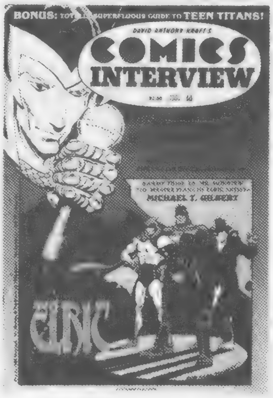
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COMICS INTERVIEW
MICHAEL T. GILBERT
ELRIC

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SURPRISE! SCRIPTER PETER DAVID PUMPS NEW LIFE INTO
SPIDER-MAN
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COMICS INTERVIEW

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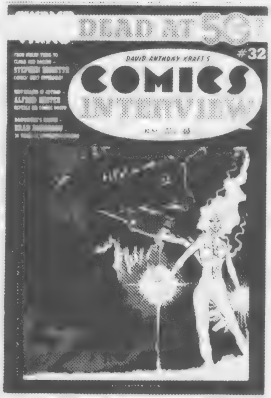
FRANK MILLER'S
DARK KNIGHT
COMICS INTERVIEW

#31 COUNTS AS 3 **Frank Miller's** DARK KNIGHT—creators of the Original Batman: **Kane, Finger, Robinson, Roussos** having conflicting memories—TV's Robin, **Burt Ward—Miller** DARK KNIGHT cover!


DEAD AT 50
#32
COMICS INTERVIEW

#32-$5.00 SWAMP THING artist **Stephen Bissette** and special portfolio—SF and Golden Age Green Lantern writer **Alfred Bester**—MARMADUKE's Brad Anderson—SWAMP THING cover!

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PAUL POWER!
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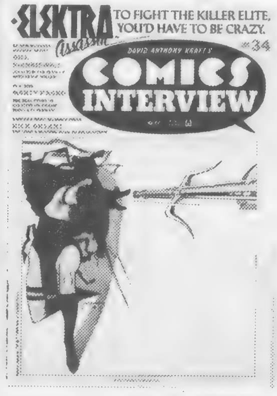
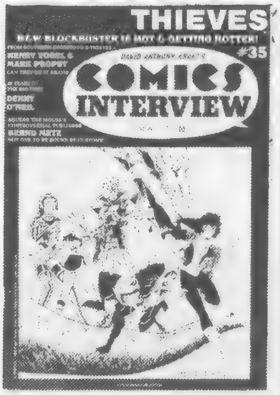
#33-$5.00 **Alan Weiss** on STEEL-GRIP STARKEY, part 1—movie artist **Paul Power** on **Lennon, Spielberg, Cheech & Chong**—FANTASIA's forgotten forefather **Jules Engel,** animation artist!


ELEKTRA Assassin
TO FIGHT THE KILLER ELITE, YOU'D HAVE TO BE CRAZY.
#34
COMICS INTERVIEW

#34-$5.00 Artist **Bill Sienkiewicz** on **Miller's** ELEKTRA—SWAMP THING, SUPERMAN & TV writer **Marty Pasko—Rick Bryant** on ghosting X-MEN art—**Alan Weiss,** part 2—ELEKTRA cover!


THIEVES
B&W BLOCKBUSTER IS HOT & GETTING HOTTER!
#35
COMICS INTERVIEW

#35-$5.00 Writer/artist team **Henry Vogel** & **Mark Propst** on X-THIEVES and SOUTHERN KNIGHTS—**Denny O'Neill,** Marvel/DC writer/editor—Catalan publisher **Bernd Metz**—more!—THIEVES & KNIGHTS cover!

new universe
COMICS INTERVIEW

#36-$5.00 **Archie Goodwin** on **Marvel's** NEW UNIVERSE—DR. WHO & JUDGE DREDD writer **Pat Mills**—Americomics' publisher/artist **Bill Black**—Marvel artist **Joe Rubinstein,** part 1—more!

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FREE PREVIEW: MICRA
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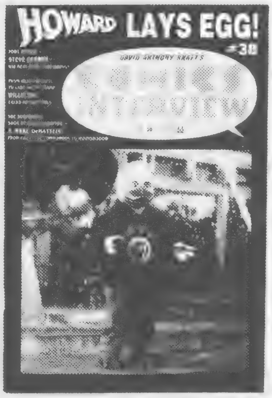
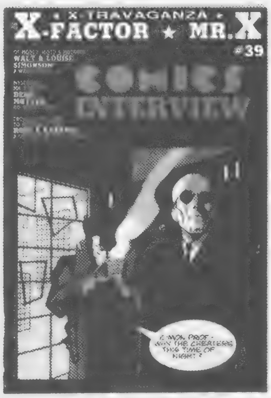
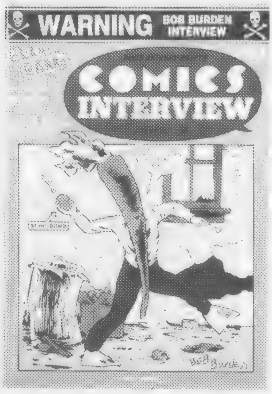

HOWARD LAYS EGG!
#38
COMICS INTERVIEW

#38-$5.00 Creator **Steve Gerber** & producer **Gloria Katz** on HOWARD THE DUCK movie—**Larry Hama**, part 2—BEANY & CECIL animation artist **Willie Ito**—writer **J. Marc DeMatteis** and more!


X-TRAVAGANZA
X-FACTOR ★ MR. X
#39
COMICS INTERVIEW
C'MON PROF - WHY THE CHEATERS THIS TIME OF NIGHT?

#39-$5.00 X-FACTOR writer & artist **Louise & Walt Simonson**—X-MEN editor **Ann Nocenti**—MR. X creator **Dean Motter**—ALPHA FLIGHT'S **Dave Ross** & WORDSMITH'S **Dave Darrigo—DeMatteis**, part [illegible]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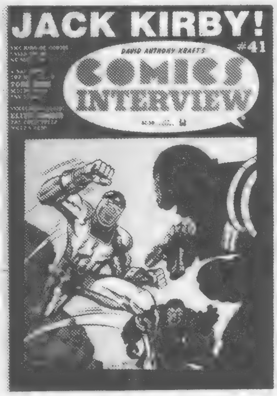
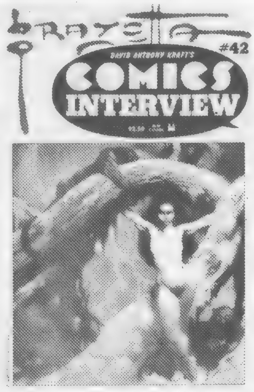
BOB BURDEN INTERVIEW
COMICS INTERVIEW
Bob Burden

#40-$5.00 FLAMING CARROT'S crazed creator, Bob Burden, part 1—Vortex publisher **Bill Marks—Darrigo & Ross**, part 2—MOONSHADOW's **J. Marc DeMatteis**, part 3—CARROT cover!


JACK KIRBY!
#41
DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
COMICS INTERVIEW

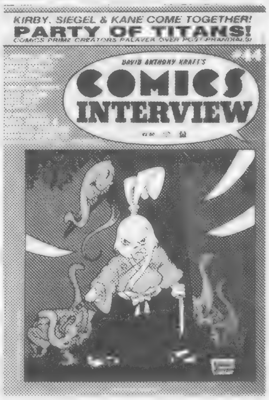
#41- COUNTS AS FIVE First (and last!) Look at Elite Comics—the King of comics calls 'em as he sees 'em: **Jack Kirby** on **Stan Lee** & Marvel—**Bob Burden** on FLAMING CARROT, part 2—**Kirby** cover!


#42
DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
COMICS INTERVIEW

#42 COUNTS AS FIVE Writer/editor **Steve Riggenberg** in a frank interview with **Frazetta**, legendary comics artist and fantasy painter, including rare photos, art and inside info—**Frazetta** cover!

SEX & VIOLENCE
IN COMICS: WHO'S TO BLAME?
#43
COMICS INTERVIEW
Will YOUR favorite comics be BANNED ?

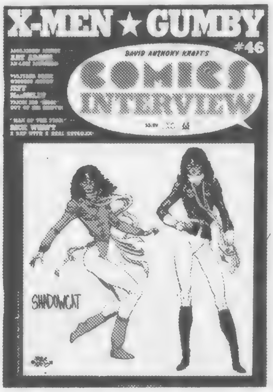
#43-$5.00 Sex & Violence in Comics: censorship, discussed by **Frank Miller, John Byrne, Steve Bissette**, Carol Kalish, Rick Obadiah, Marvel's original founding attorney—more!


KIRBY, SIEGEL & KANE COME TOGETHER!
PARTY OF TITANS!
#44
DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
COMICS INTERVIEW

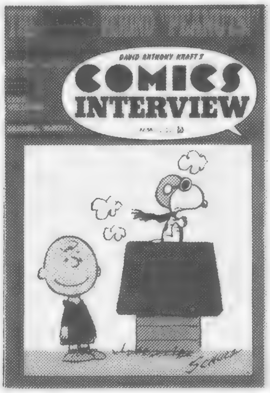
#44-$5.00 Comics greats **Jerry Siegel, Jack Kirby & Bob Kane** party—TV stars & comics writers **Bill Mumy & Miguel Ferrer—Stan Sakai** on USAGI YOJIMBO—Harvey Comics' **Ken Selig**—more!

MOEBIUS AT MARVEL!
COMICS INTERVIEW

#45-$5.00 **Moebius** at Marvel!—DC's **Richard Bruning & Bob Rozakis** on DARK KNIGHT & WATCHMEN, part 1—KATY KEENE's **Bill Woggon & Barb Rausch**, part 1—lots more—**Moebius** cover!


X-MEN ★ GUMBY
#46
DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
COMICS INTERVIEW
SHADOWCAT

#46 COUNTS AS FIVE X-MEN & GUMBY artist **Art Adams** exclusive first interview—Pulitzer Prize-winning artist **Jeff MacNelly—Woggon & Rausch**, part 2—**Bruning & Rozakis**, part 2—**Art Adams** cover!


DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
COMICS INTERVIEW
SCHULZ

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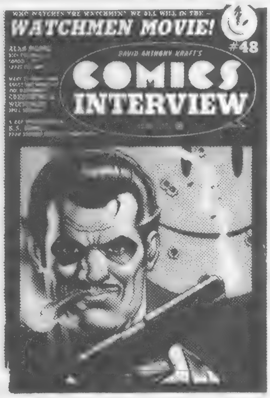
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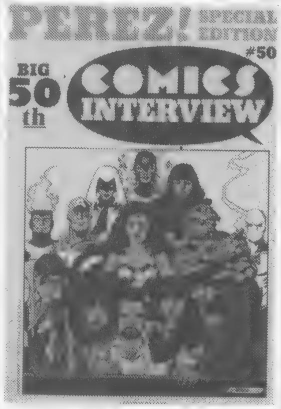
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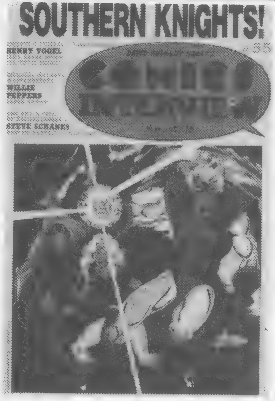
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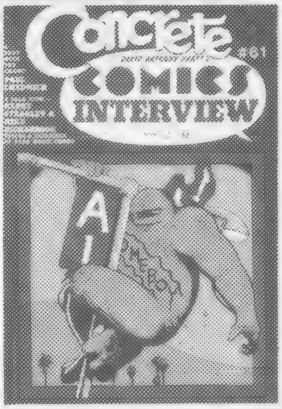
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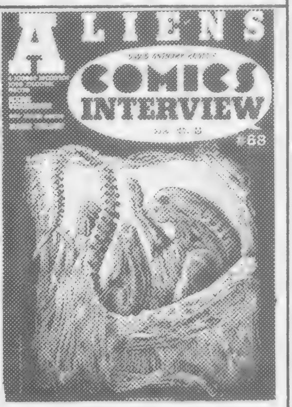
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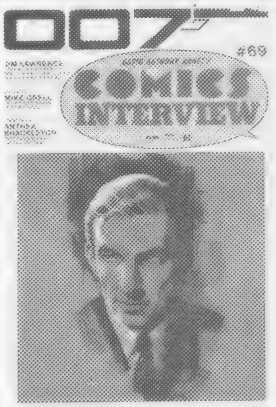
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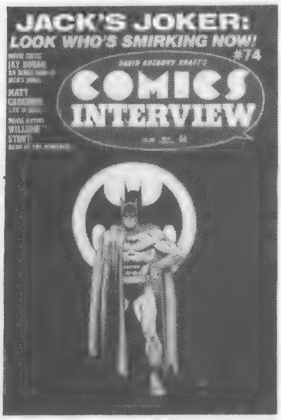
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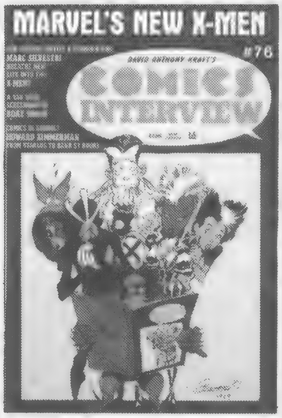
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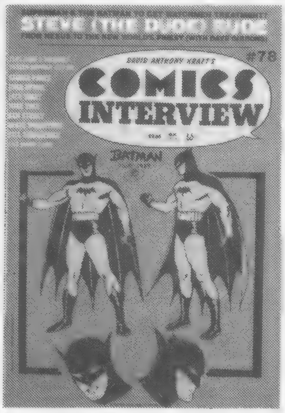
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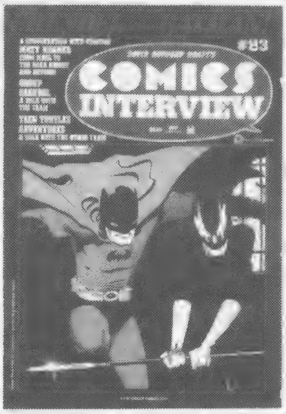
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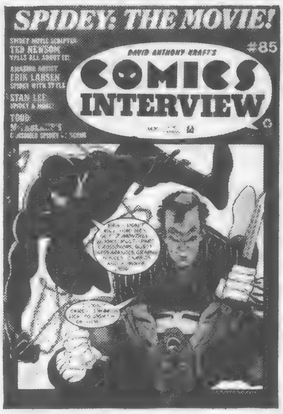
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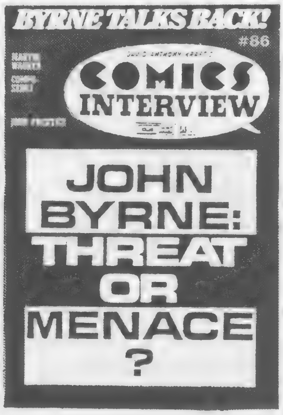
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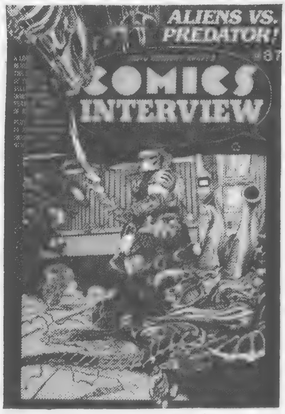
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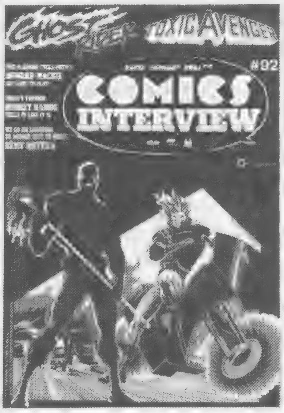
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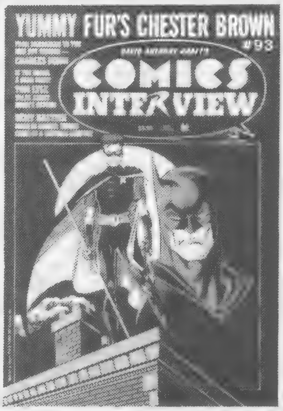
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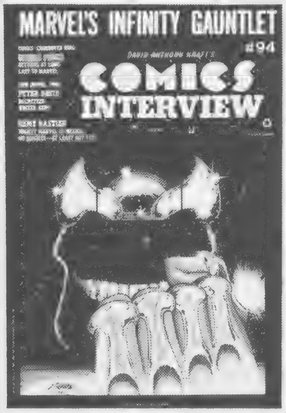
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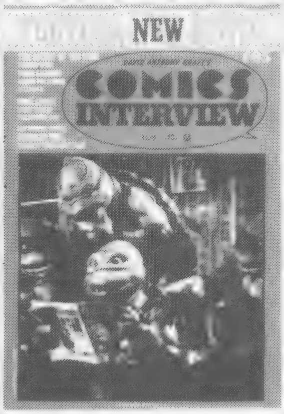
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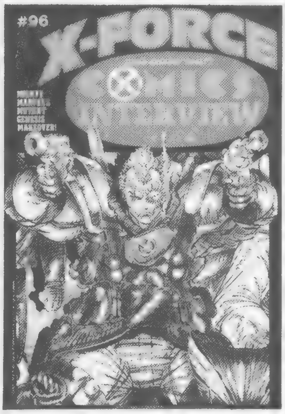
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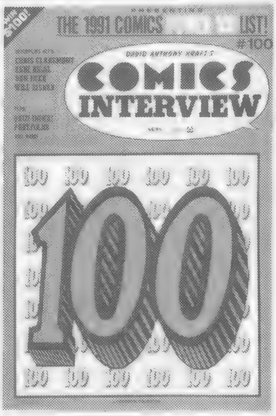
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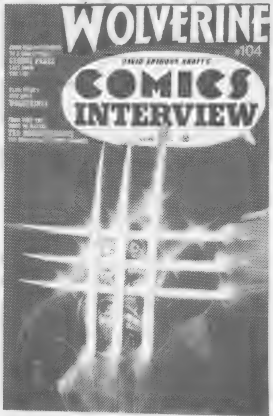
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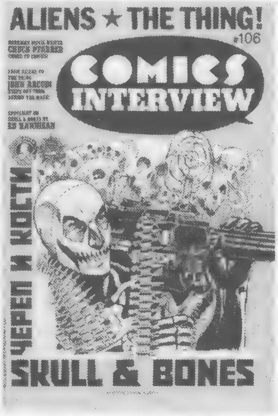
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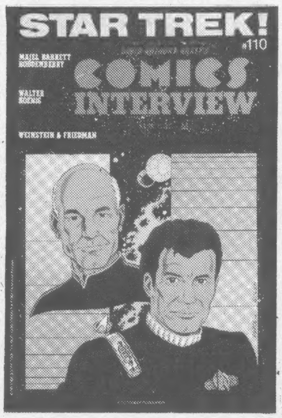
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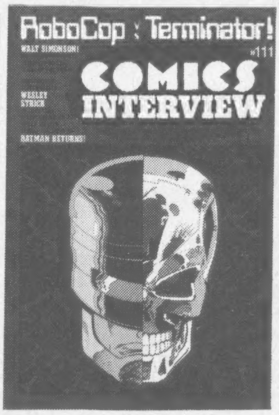
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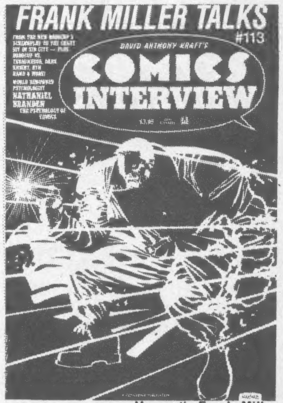
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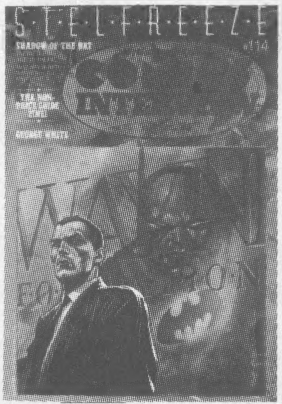
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#117
KELLEY JONES
DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
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SAM KIETH
DAVID MAZZUCCHELLI
C'MON OUT, YA FRAGGIN' BASTICH...
I AIN'T GOT ALL NIGHT!

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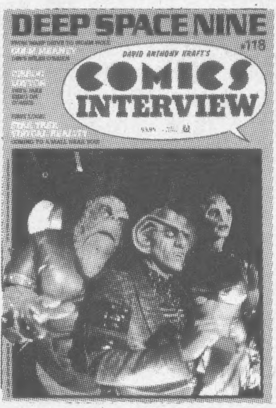
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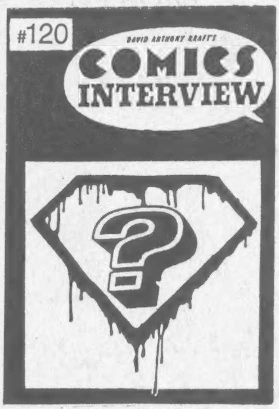
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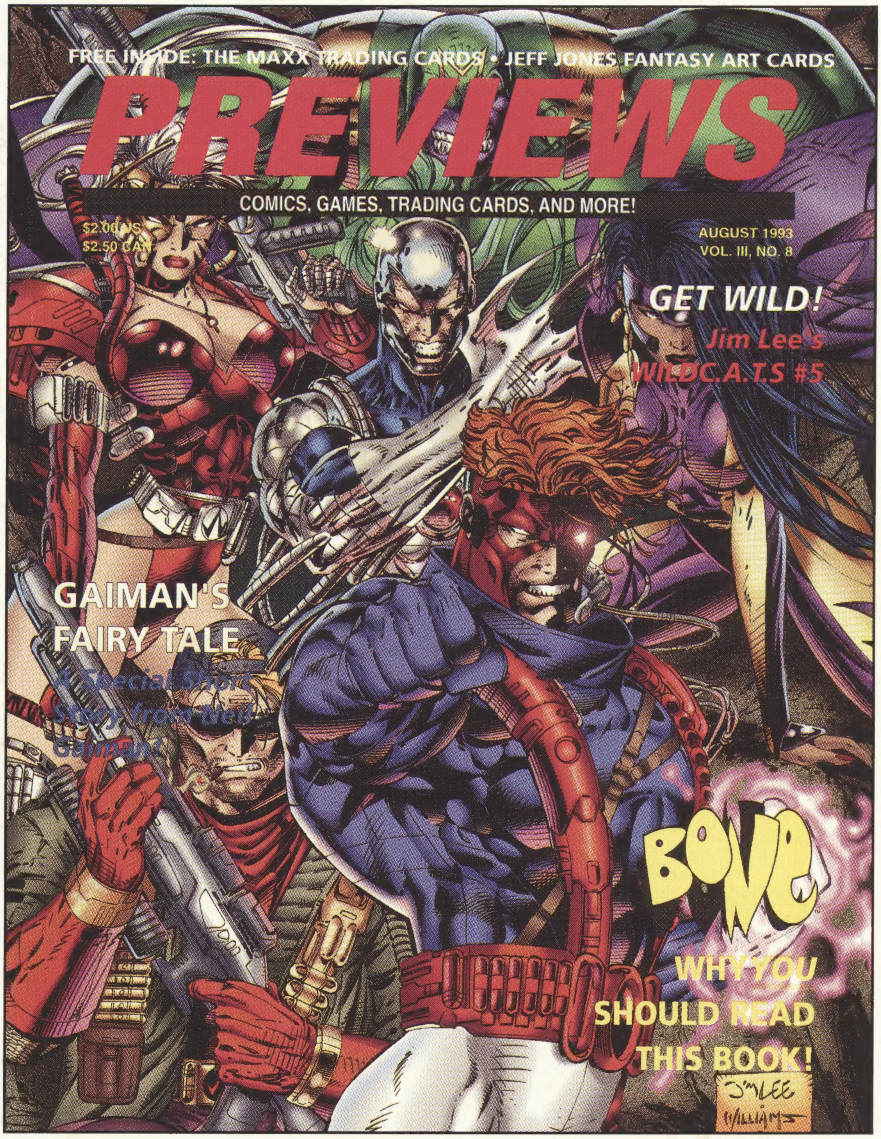

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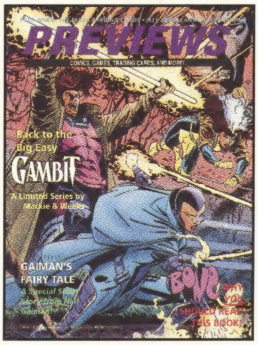

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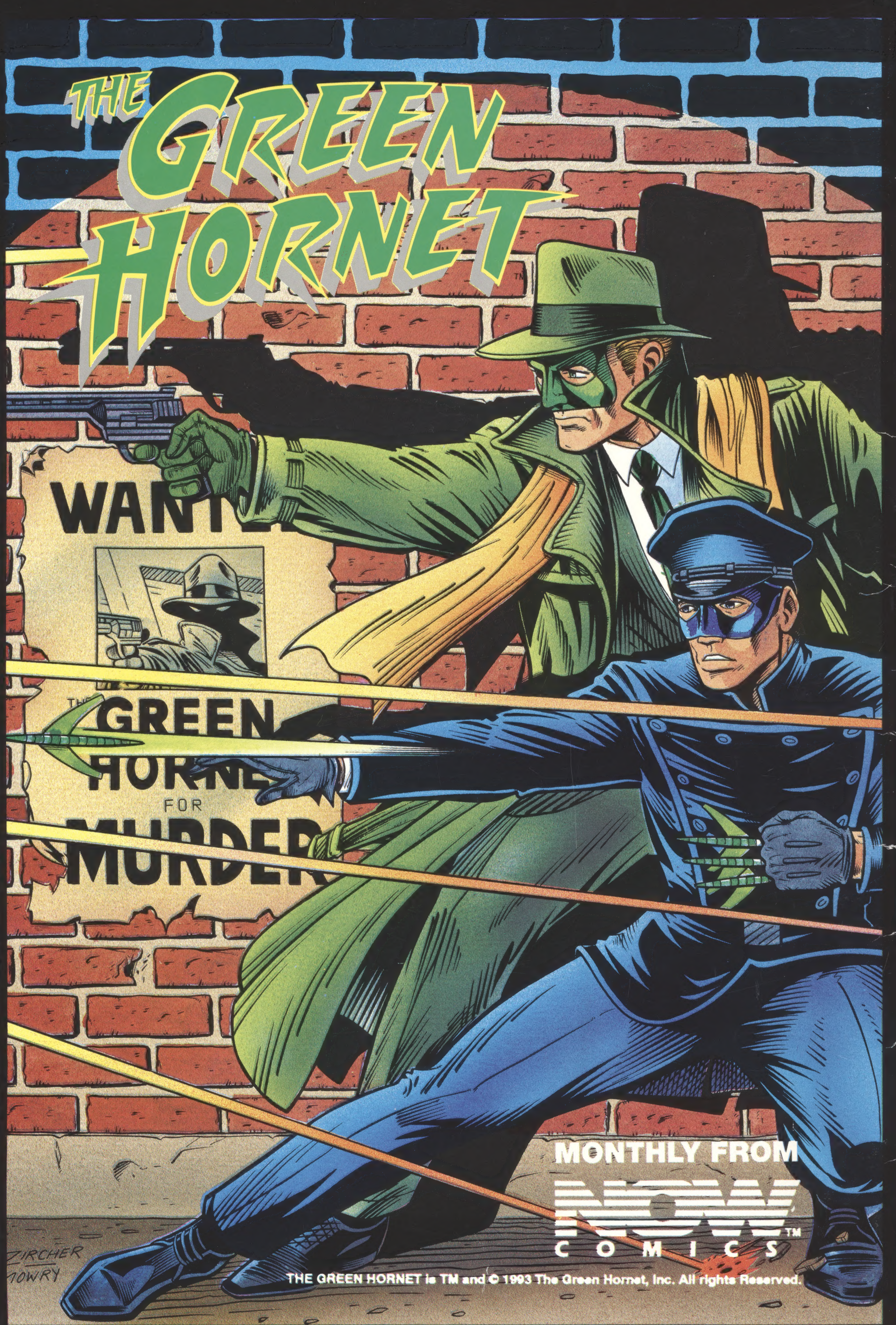
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